

The Future of Work podcast is a weekly show where Jacob has in-depth conversations with senior level executives, business leaders, and bestselling authors around the world on the future of work and the future in general. Topics cover everything from AI and automation to the gig economy to big data to the future of learning and everything in between. Each episode explores a new topic and features a special guest.

You can listen to past episodes at www.TheFutureOrganization.com/future-work-podcast/. To learn more about Jacob and the work he is doing please visit www.TheFutureOrganization.com. You can also subscribe to Jacob's [YouTube](#) channel, follow him on [Twitter](#), or visit him on [Facebook](#).

Jacob: Hello, everyone. Welcome to another episode of the Future of Work podcast. My guest today is Cal Newport, computer science professor at Georgetown University and author of a brand new book called Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World. Cal, thank you so much joining me.

Cal: Well, it's my pleasure.

Jacob: Well, before we jump into the book, why don't we start with a bit of background information about you. You've written several books. You're a professor at Georgetown. How did you get involved with all of this sort of stuff? Did you know you wanted to do all this when you were a kid?

Cal: No. I couldn't have predicted, as a kid, where I would end up. My path as a writer is maybe interesting. I wrote my first book when I was a college student. And it was, appropriately enough, a book of student advice. I figured who better to write student advice guides than actual students? So that's how I got started writing. I ended up writing three books for students during my undergraduate and graduate school years. And then as I advanced to my computer science career, I began to get more interested in this notion of what's the impact of the type of technologies I study as an academic. What's the impact on our culture? What's the impact on our ability to work, or to be happy, or to live satisfying lives? I just got very interested in that question. And so starting with my last book, Deep Work, and this current book, Digital Minimalism, I've really gone deep in trying to understand these interesting and really relevant questions about how this new technology is impacting us.

Jacob: I don't suppose your books that you wrote when you were in college are out there floating around somewhere?

Cal: Oh, yeah. Yeah. They were all three published by Random House. They were all three very much available. You can get them on Amazon or Barnes and Noble. They still sell pretty well. My whole conceit with those books, which turned out to be a smart one, was as a student, I was a little bit insulted by the advice books that were on the shelf back then because I felt like they were condescending. There seemed to be this sense, in the student advice publishing space back then, the late '90s and early 2000s, that you had to be sort of cute and quirky and fun, or the students would be turned off and say, "This isn't cool." And so what I did was pretty simple. I said, "I'm gonna write student

advice books just like business books. So none of the condescending stuff, none of the quirky cute stuff. It's gonna be, "Okay, you wanna get straight A's? Here's how straight A students study. You wanna be more successful in college? I talked to 20 Rhodes Scholars. Here's what they did that was different." And so all I did was take the students seriously, and we've sold hundreds of thousands of copies of those books. So it was a simple shift. And I guess I had to be a student to know that was the right shift to make. But those books are definitely still out there.

Jacob: Wow. Very cool. I'll have to make sure to check some of those out. I love the different approach, the no-fluff approach to writing those books. So today, what does a typical day look like for you? Obviously, you're a professor at Georgetown. You're speaking. You're writing books. I mean, what does a usual day look like in the life of Cal Newport?

Cal: Well, there's no one typical day. There's sort of various types of days. So there's my teaching days, which are very much typical professor style days. I'm at the university. I'm teaching. I'm meeting with students. I'm prepping lectures. I'm doing the sort of standard professor. Then there's deep work days, where I'm researching my academic research. I'm reading, and I'm writing. And that's more or less all I do.

Cal: What you'll notice on all these days, though, is I really spend very little time using the internet as a source of distraction or entertainment. So I've never had a social media account. I don't web surf. I spend long periods of time without my phone. So if you were to be a fly on the wall in the typical days of Cal Newport, that's probably something after a while you would begin to notice is, where are all the quick checks of the browser tabs or the phone? That's the one thing that I don't do.

Jacob: Wait, wait, wait. Okay, I got questions now. You said you don't have any social media accounts. You don't do web surfing. And you go for long periods without your phone. Well, I'm assuming, obviously your book talks a lot about this as well. But before we jump into some of the advice, I'm curious, just why do you decide to do this? I mean, how do you ... Some people listening to this are like, "How do you not have a Facebook account? How are you not tweeting? Why did you decide to not go down the social media path? And do you ever feel like you're missing out a little bit?"

Cal: No, I don't worry about that at all. There's plenty of things that I already know I really value in my life. And I would rather spend a lot more energy on those than dissipate that energy to spread it around things that might occasionally bring me smaller value. Now, the reason I didn't sign up for social media in the first place, it's a little bit happenstance. I was a college student at the time that Facebook came to your campus. So back when they were just releasing it to colleges one by one. So I was at Dartmouth College in the early 2000s. And it was 2004. They started by going school by school, mainly the Ivy League back then.

Cal: The difference was, is I had just closed down a dot-com company. I had started a dot-com company, a small one. But I started one in the late '90s during the original internet boom. And so when the Facebook.com came to our campus, I looked over and learned about this kid, Mark Zuckerberg. I was like, "Oh, here's someone basically my age who also had tech company. His is doing better than mine." And just, I don't know, maybe

childish jealousy or this or that, I said, "I'm not gonna go sign up for Mark's service. You know? I'm not gonna be a pawn in his game of making him money." And just sort of some professional jealousy or whatever. And so I just didn't bother signing up.

Cal: The after a couple of years, the fact that I hadn't signed up gave me this interested perspective. I could see over time the shifting relationship people had with it. And so that led me to start writing about it from a critical standpoint. And over time, I emerged as sort of a strong critical thinker on social media and the role in people's success and happiness.

Jacob: I find I'm kind of conflicted in this regard because one of the things that has allowed me to build up a business for myself, and to sell books, and to speak, has been social media. So I'm trying to think, like, if I didn't start a blog, if I didn't have social media accounts that I started a decade ago, where would I be now in my career? Would I still have a full-time job? Would I have even been able to write any books? So part of me is very dependent on social media for work. But then the other part of me also very much acknowledges and recognizes that people are very addicted to it. Even when I put something up online, it's very tempting to go back and look and see how many likes it got, how many comments did it get?

Jacob: So I'm sort of ... I don't know. I guess conflicted is the right word there. I'm just trying to imagine where I would have ended up, had it not been for any of that social media stuff that's out there. But I guess it depends if you're using it for work or for personal.

Cal: Yeah, that's a big distinction. And I think there's two important points to make here. One, you're in a rarefied position when it comes to social media because you happen to run what's essentially an online media company. So that's a very specific need. And so your relationship with social media is probably vastly different than 99% of your audience who are maybe in a traditional job, or running a company that has very little to do with social media outside of maybe using it for some targeted advertising. So that is a different situation.

Cal: And two, I'd like to emphasize, I have a pretty narrow definition. The social media that I'm wary of is the social media that's run by massive attention economy conglomerates, like Facebook or Instagram or Twitter. So blogging, for example, I love. I've been blogging for over a decade. And I see that as a very different type of endeavor. You own your own content. You're on your own server. You're not making money for other people. Like Nicholas Carr used the term "digital sharecropping" to explain what it's like when you're on these social media platforms, wildly creating content so that they can monetize it to make money off of you, right? So I'm a big fan of blogging.

Cal: I'm also a big fan of the social internet. You know, the idea the internet is great for connecting people, spreading ideas, and spreading interesting ideas, and enabling activists. I think the internet is great. It's the giant social media companies and the products that they produce that I'm suspicious of. So I think it's certainly possible to be someone like me, who you can think of as, some degree, in the online media space. I mean, I write and I speak. And I have the social media presence on the big platforms. And it's been fine. I have a really good audience on my blog that I've developed over the

years. And I have a good connection with them. And it's a good place for me to test out ideas. I spend a lot of time on my books. I think I write good books, and they tend to spread very far. And I haven't seen a major negative impact for not also engaging with the tapping and the swiping and the clicking.

Jacob: Yeah, which is something that most people listening to this show spend a lot of time with the swiping and the tapping and the clicking. So your book, *Digital Minimalism*, why did you feel the need to write this book? What is it that kind of ... You know, you sat down and said, "You know what? This book needs to be out there."

Cal: So in 2016, I had published a book called *Deep Work*, which was really about the unexpected consequences of technologies in the workplace. Right? So it had this argument that these new technologies in the workplace were making it more and more difficult for people to concentrate for sustained amounts of time. But the shifts in the knowledge economy towards more complicated work tasks was making concentration more valuable. So there was this mismatch, where concentration was becoming more valuable at the same time that it was becoming more rare. And therefore, if you're one of the few to cultivate your ability to focus, you'd have this big competitive advantage. Right?

Cal: So this was my 2016 book. It was basically about technology in the workplace. When I started promoting that book and going on the road and talking to people, one of the most common responses I got was, "Okay, maybe I buy this premise about the negative impact of technology in the workplace. But what about the impact of technology in our personal lives?" And people were really giving me this sense that this was the bigger problem. What was happening in their personal lives, there was this shift. And I'm not sure if you felt this too, but I certainly felt it around my audience. Sometime in the last two years or so, there was this shift where people stopped making self-deprecating jokes about how often they check their phone and started to actually get really concerned. People got past this notion of like, "Oh, this is all fun, and maybe I use it too much," and really began to get worried that there was serious impacts on the quality of their life being caused by the digital tools in their personal life.

Cal: They knew they were using these things more than was useful, more than was healthy. They were beginning to fear that some of these tools were manipulating not just how they spent their time, but what they believed and how they felt, in some sort of weird hard to pin down algorithmic abstract obtuse way. And they were getting fed up. "This isn't good. My life is worse because I'm on these things too much. They're having impacts I can't understand." They wanted more than just tips. They needed more than just tricks. This wasn't working. There seemed to be a need in the marketplace for a strong response. Here is a strong aggressive response if you wanna take back your personal life from a lot of those digital distractions. And it was out of that, that *Digital Minimalism* was born.

Jacob: I think you're right. Over the past years, I've certainly noticed that as well. Just even from friends and from family members. And I don't know what has happened over the last two years. And maybe it's all the issues, the media that we're seeing around Facebook and Twitter, and some of the executives that have come out, like Sean Parker,

who basically talked about how Facebook was designed to be addicting. But yeah, something has happened over the past few years where there's definitely been kind of a shift from like, "He-he, ha-ha, I check Facebook all the time," to like, "I got a problem. I'm on these social channels non-stop." And I think studies have been done now. It's becoming a real studied and observed and looked at issue, whereas I think prior to that, it was just kind of like, "Oh, look, you're on Twitter again, he-he." So definitely, definitely something is happening. Now, you mentioned tech at work. And obviously, this is a little bit on your previous book. But just so listeners are aware, what type of technologies were you talking about when you say technology at work?

Cal: Well, really the rise of digital communication tools over the last 25 years. So email, Instant Messenger, the increasing use of SMS in the office environment. These have had a profound effect on the actual rhythms of work. And it happened, I think, maybe slowly enough that we didn't notice that drastic changes were happening, like the water slowly heating up around the frog in the boiling pot. But if you look at the way we work now from a sort of objective lens. Maybe compare it to 30 years ago. It really is quite different. Work has, especially in the knowledge sector, devolved into what I sometimes call the hyperactive hive mind workflow. Which means we just constantly communicate all day long. It's essentially an ongoing, ad hoc, unstructured conversation. Messages and chats and texts just bouncing back and forth. We're all a part of this sort of big organizational conversation. We sort of just try to figure things out on the fly.

Cal: And my basic argument is that I'm not surprised that this approach to work evolved. Because it's very flexible and it's very simple. But the problem, is that it turns out to be exactly the wrong way to work, if what you need to do is actually use your brain to produce new value. And this is the huge conflict that's driving people crazy in the workspace today, is that knowledge work requires people to take brains, process information, concentrate on the information, and produce new valuable information.

Cal: But we're organizing our work with this constant back and forth conversation, which makes us really, really bad at concentrating and producing value. And so we're living, essentially, a contradiction. We're working in a way that makes us really bad at working. And this is a really reason why I think so many people are getting so frustrated and feeling so burnt out about what it means to work in the digital age.

Jacob: Yeah, and this doesn't even include things like Slack, and now even Facebook at Work. I think since you're ... I don't know if talked about Facebook at Work in your previous book. But I think Facebook at Work really just became mainstream in 2018. So probably just after your book came out. So it seems like it's become even worse, more technologies, more platforms, more distractions since your book even came out. So now it's total chaos.

Cal: It really is. And the way I like to think about it, I have this framework I call attention capital theory. But if you look at an industrial plant, when you look at the Tesla factory, for example, it's really clear what the main capital investment is. What is the stuff that's making us money in the Tesla factories, you have these machines, these machines that build various parts of the car. And that's the key. You invest money in those machines.

You want those machines to run well, to work quickly. And they produce cars to produce value.

Cal: Well, in a knowledge work organization, it's no different except for now, the main capital investment, the thing that produces the value, is the human brains. The human brains are the high-priced machines that we have in the Tesla factory. And in particular their ability to concentrate on information and add value to it is the primary way that value is created in a knowledge work environment.

Cal: So if you come into one of those environments and say, "Okay, but these same human brains, our main capital investment, the thing that produces all the value, we're gonna force these same brains to also monitor a Slack channel, and monitor and email inbox. What you're doing is making that brain really, really bad at it's primary duty of producing new value and information. It's the equivalent of going into the Tesla factory and putting sand in the gears of the robot car building machines so that they move much slowly, and they break down a lot, and you have to replace them a lot, right?"

Cal: If you did that in a Tesla factory, they'd say, "You're crazy. We're losing money." And if you said, "Yeah, but it's just really convenient for me to have sand in here," I'd say, "I don't care if it's convenient. Our game is make money by producing cars." It's the same thing in knowledge work. You think, "Oh, it's really convenient if we're all on the Slack channel because then if there's an urgent thing, I can always get your attention." But the main capital investment is those brains' ability to concentrate. You can't have a brain have to do both those things, to concentrate and produce value, and tend an ongoing conversation.

Cal: And there's a lot of science behind why that is. The sort of TLDR summary is that content switching significantly reduces a brain's ability to concentrate and produce value. So the constant content switching required to maintain that constant conversation just makes brains terrible at producing value. And it burns you out. That tension is incredibly difficult. Your brain hates it. It's trying to concentrate. But you're doing these things that makes it really bad at concentrating. And I think that's just an issue. I mean, to the point of, I'm actually writing a new book right now called *A World Without Email*, that is really going deep into this idea that we're completely misunderstanding how to produce value in the knowledge era, and the stuff we're doing with communication and self-destructive and something that we're gonna have to move past.

Jacob: Oh, man. I've talked about email being a problem for years. You know, when email first came around, it was acceptable, like, if you sent an email to somebody, they would get back to you in like two days. And now, if you send an email to somebody, and they don't respond within like 30 minutes, people are running around the office, "Have you seen Cal? I emailed him 30 minutes ago. I haven't ..." And it's sort of like email is becoming this new chat program, where the second you email somebody, they gotta respond. And it's crazy.

Cal: Yeah, which by the way, the reason we did that once that tool came around is not surprising. This is what we're hard-wired to do. If you go back to, say, Paleolithic times.

The way we're used to communicating is that there's two or three of us on a hunt, and you talk back and forth. Like, "Hey, do you see that? What's going on over there? You move around there." This is the way we're wired to work.

Cal: Now, of course, research in organizational management has discovered the obvious truth, that once you have more than about four or five people trying to just maintain an ongoing unstructured conversation, it becomes really inefficient. Our brains never expected there to be more than four or five people in the conversation. But that's our instinct, is ... I wanna just ... Like, we're sitting around the fire or hiding in the bushes together about to attack the mastodon or whatever, is we should just sort of have an ad hoc conversation. That's how we used to coordinate throughout all of our sort of species evolutionary history. But when you scale up to a large organization, and you try to replicate that chat around the campfire, with Facebook at Work or Slack, it doesn't work.

Cal: But it's not surprising that that's our instinct because that's the way that we have evolved. But what I think is funny about it is that people think that they're being all futuristic when they adopt these new fancy communication tools in the office. But they're not being futuristic. They're being Paleolithic, actually using really, really old ideas that don't fit well in the modern workplace.

Jacob: It's funny, there are some shows I watch on Netflix, like The Last Kingdom, which is all about this Dane versus Saxon debate, and how England was started. And I always find it fascinating because, obviously, there was no Twitter at the time. So these people are on horseback. And they send messengers. And it takes days, sometimes weeks to deliver a message from one part of the kingdom to another kingdom somewhere far away. And I'm sitting there thinking, like, I can't imagine what it would be like today if it took days to deliver a message from one part of the world to the other. But it's funny, that's how it used to be done. And today, we're so used to like, it has to be in a second. And I need to get it ASAP. So it's interesting to think about.

Jacob: So I'm curious. If you were design, or to build, your own kind of company. Let's say you were the CEO of, I don't know, a 100,000 person company. Would you get rid of all of these social communication tools? No email, no Slack, no Facebook at Work. You would just toss it all out?

Cal: I wouldn't toss it out. But I wouldn't allow it to be the default. So the problem with the way we work now is that we just default to this, "If we can all reach each other at anytime, we can just have the ongoing Paleolithic hive mind conversation," because that's the easiest default to do. And so what you wanna think about is, how would we run this company 30 years ago if none of this technology existed? So actually start thinking like the way they do in the industrial sector. What are the key processes that produce value? What are the key processes that support the value production? And actually think them through. Okay, then what's the best way to structure these things? What's the interface through which information comes into processes and goes out? How does communication work? And then go back and find the right tools to support these optimized processes.

Cal: So, for example, if I was running Google, one of the first things I would do is, say, if I'm hiring a 10x programmer at a huge salary, let's say I'm paying half a million dollars a year for a 10x programmer. I don't want them to have an email address. Are you kidding me? This brain is something I'm investing massive money into so that this brain can produce beautiful code that's gonna be incredibly useful to producing mass amounts of money for our company. So no, of course that person can't have an email address. I'll hire a dedicated assistant to take as much as possible off of this person's brain, including all the logistical stuff. I don't want HR to be able to bother him about his parking space. I don't want the cafeteria making him fill out a survey. No, no, no. I don't want anyone to be able to reach and content switch that brain. I want him and his team to be in a beautiful soundproof room. And right outside the door, we can have a full time assistant that has all the communication logistics on their behalf for something like this.

Cal: I would think about things in terms of attention capital. I have these brains. These brains produce value by concentrating on things. How can I set up an environment in which these brains can operate at the highest possible efficiency and effectiveness, and make things like convenience or avoiding the occasional bad thing, make that much lower priority. So what are the key things we do to produce value? How do we get the most value out of human brains? And then work backwards from that to engineer how our office would actually run.

Jacob: That's an interesting thing to think about. I feel like today, everybody just assumes that connectivity implies availability. So just because you are connected means you always have to be available. And of course that, I think, is a very terrible way for us to think about work. And it's interesting, when I interview some executives on the podcast, I always ask them, "Do you remember what it was like to work 20 years ago?" And they would, of course, all say, "There was no email. There was no computer. No internet." None of this stuff. And we would spend a lot of time having discussions, having conversations, like actually doing advisory work, having more of this kind of work happening. And even if somebody wanted to get in touch with you, you didn't have a cell phone. You had to give them the phone number of the company that you were gonna be visiting if you were a consultant. And you had intercoms and little pink slips that people would leave on your desk if you missed a message. And your time was spent actually doing stuff. And today, it feels like a lot of your time is spent checking stuff. And I personally find it amazing that any work gets done anywhere at any company in the world. I would just go nuts.

Cal: Well, there's massive amounts of money being left on the table here. But I'm not surprised because these things do take time. And so one of the things I've studied is what happened in the industrial sector after the industrial revolution? How long did it take for us to get from, "We have these new technologies," like the steam engine, or water power. We have railroad infrastructure. You know, we have these new technologies that we can build stuff at an industrial scale. How long did it take for us to get from that to actually building stuff really efficiently? Right? And it took a really long time. I mean, we didn't get the assembly line until a decade or two into the 20th century. Right? It took a long time to figure out how do we take these technologies, how do we take this new business sector and run it efficiently?

Cal: Digital knowledge work, knowledge work in the era of digital communications, is about 20 to 25 years old. And that's nothing. I mean, if you look at sort of economic history, that's a very small timeframe. So I'm not surprised that we're still running knowledge work organizations in this sort of simplistic way, this story of hyperactive hive mind. Everyone just talks to everyone type way. It's just the same way that Henry Ford built cars before the assembly line. Right? What was the easiest way to do it? You had a team here that was building the car right here. Then you had another team over here building a car over there, right? This was just the natural way. This is how we built cars.

Cal: The assembly line, when it came along, was much less convenient. Huge pain. Had a lot of sharp corners and ways it could go wrong. If you didn't configure it just right and one part of the assembly line got going too fast compared to others, the whole thing could come to a stop. It required more managers. It required more investment. But it produced cars like a hundred times faster. And so we're gonna have similar shifts happens. It's inevitable. I think the first big companies that realize, "If we get rid of this culture of we just organize everything through an ongoing, unstructured conversation, if we get rid of this culture, we can produce a lot more value." Once the first company does that, just like everyone else followed Ford's assembly line in the auto industry, the same thing's gonna happen in knowledge work.

Cal: But I do think it's gonna require an actual cultural change. And a big issue, I believe, and a lot of the conversation around work and work productivity is that people are thinking too small. People are convinced that it's just we have the norms wrong. And if we could just tweak the norms a little bit, we'd be okay. It's just people are expecting email responses too soon. And so if we could just set the norm that you're not gonna hear from me maybe for a day, then everything would be okay. That's not gonna solve the problem.

Cal: The problem is not the norms. The problem is that your entire organization actually depends on me answering your email right away for it to function, that you've built an entire workflow on this idea that, like the hunter-gatherers 10,000 years ago, that we have to maintain a flexible ongoing conversation to get anything done. So you actually have to change the fundamental way your organization works before we're gonna get away from these issues of needing to constantly be available and tend these channels.

Jacob: Is a part of the issues, policies, bureaucracy, hierarchy. Are those some of the reasons why you think we, or a lot of employees, feel like they always need to be connected? You know, we don't give employees enough autonomy. We don't give them enough, I guess, responsibility to make their own decisions. So they're constantly having to message and check with other people. Is that one of the issues that's maybe blocking some of this up?

Cal: No, I think the primary issue is that we haven't given them an alternative? Right? I mean, so you walk into a typical company. They say, "This is the way we function. For the most part, be in your inbox. We'll figure things out on the fly. Like, if you need something, email someone. And then maybe check on them. Maybe if I need something from you, I'll email you. If I have a question, if there's a crisis, we'll just communicate. We'll have this ongoing conversation. Just like the old car manufacturers use to say,

"Well, I come to work, and I get together with my team, and we build a car right here in this spot on the factory floor." The reason they're doing that is not because there was some impediment. It's because no one came along and said, "We're gonna use the assembly line now."

Cal: So I really think it's systemic. It's the way that we actually approach work. And that's what we have to understand, is that this thing we're doing, where we keep this ongoing conversation, is not synonymous with work. A lot of people think, "This is just what it means to work in the age of networks." It's not synonymous with work. It's a very specific way to work. One among many different ways that we could structure these organizations. And so I really think the key to getting past this is they organization as a whole has to say, "This is the alternative way that we work." We no longer handle 'x' by just sending emails back and forth. We have a different process. These people don't have an email address attached to their name anymore. There's an email address attached maybe to their whole team, and they're ..." You know, much more drastic changes I think are needed. Until you replace the underlying workflow with something more structured, we are gonna have to go back to the sort of ongoing hyperactive hive mind ongoing conversation.

Jacob: What about the companies out there that'll say, "Oh, you know what? Because of Slack, or because of Facebook at Work, or because of email, we were able to collaborate better. We came up with all these great new ideas. We were able to identify this problem that nobody else was able to figure out." Because, you know, all these vendors, they all have customer case studies and stories on their websites of all these wonderful things they were able to accomplish with their platforms. It sounds like what you're saying is, "Yeah, that's great. But you could have been able to do much more."

Cal: Yeah. Right. I mean, tools are tools. And tools can be useful, or they can be non-useful. But it depends on what's the workflow in which they're deployed. So software companies are getting out ahead of this. You see a growing number of software companies, especially smaller companies that are moving toward agile methodologies, for example, like Scrum. And in these more agile methodologies, there is no real notion of necessarily ongoing conversation or email. And it's actually much more based on two things. Pre-scheduled synchronous communication and transparency in tasks. So you have these synchronous standing meetings, where everyone gets together at set times. "Here's what I'm working on. Here's what I need." Everyone syncs up what they need. Essentially, you can wait til the next meeting if you need something else. And then, who's working on what? What's the status of things. It's captured on a board that everyone can see. It's this transparent system. So it's not just amorphously existing as emails in various people's inboxes.

Cal: And so, you can often find software teams that have no need for email. Right? Because they're using this other methodology. So why are we seeing that ... We're probably seeing that first happening in software because producing a software product is really close to manufacturing. Right? So it's not surprising those are the first places that we see this similar type of process engineering that we saw in the earlier 20th century in manufacturing. But so you can build workflows that do not require a synchronous unstructured communication. But it has to be very specific. And so I think agile

methodologies like Scrum is a great example of how we're seeing ideas coming over from manufacturing into knowledge work that's structuring who works on what, how do we communicate what we need, how do we keep track of what's going on? And is giving alternatives to the default answer to those questions, which right now in most places is just, "Well, we'll just keep talking about it in an inbox."

Jacob: I love that. "Let's keep talking about it." Say, you know, "Let's have a meeting to schedule a meeting." Yeah, it's totally gotten out of control. Well, I wanna switch gears a little bit and talk about some of the concepts in your new book because they're very much tied to, I think, your previous book. One, obviously, more focused on work, one more focused on personal. So to transition to this new book on digital minimalism, I want to ask you, do you think we are addicted to social media? And that's kind of ... A lot of people usually think of addiction, you know, drugs, alcohol, stuff like that. I feel like some people are still trying to wrap their minds around the word addiction and social media, and if that's even a real thing. So what do you think?

Cal: You know, it's an issue I looked pretty deeply into when researching the book. And I think the issue that people are having is that there's varied definitions of addiction. So what people often think about when they think about addiction is substance addiction. You know, you're addicted to an actual substance that can penetrate the blood brain barrier, and can directly be chemical reactive in your brain. So nicotine, or opioids, right? And obviously, substance addictions can be incredibly powerful. One of the things you get with substance addictions, for example, is really strong physical withdrawal, if you're away from the substance that you crave. And this is typically what people think about when they think about addictions. And our relationship with social media is not like that, except for maybe in some very, very extreme cases that's found more, actually, in compulsive video game playing than it is in social media. We don't have substance style dependencies on social media.

Cal: But what we do seem to see more of is what they would call in the psychological literature a moderate behavioral addiction. So a moderate behavioral addiction is something that, if I took it away from you, like if I just said, "Hey, you're kicked off Facebook. You're not allowed to use it anymore," you're not gonna have withdrawal. Right? You're not gonna be up late shaking. You're not gonna sneak out in the middle of night to find an internet café to get a fix of Facebook, right? It's not that strong. But it's strong enough that if you're in the presence of this service, you're probably gonna use it more than is healthy for you.

Cal: And so one of the places you see moderate behavioral addictions a lot is, for example, in junk food eating. Right? So if there's doughnuts, let's say, at your office. I put out doughnuts everyday, and they're always out there, right? I mean, you're probably gonna eat more doughnuts. You might get a behavioral addiction, where you just associate your morning coffee with one of those doughnuts. It's very hard for you to resist eating the doughnuts. You eat a lot more doughnuts than is healthy for you.

Cal: But if I stop putting the doughnuts out, you're not gonna get the shakes. You know, you're not gonna sneak out and go to a bakery. And that's what it's like with social media. That if you have access to it, you're probably gonna use it way more than you

think is healthy. And the problem is, is that you do have universal access to it. It's in our pocket. It's on a phone. And so people are using it well more than they think is healthy. They know they're using it more than they think is healthy. They know they're using it to the detriment of other things. And I think that's where a lot of people are with social media right now.

Jacob: Yeah, I think that makes a lot of sense. And actually, I'm sure some people actually would sneak out to an internet café and go check Facebook and go check their tweets. Of course, in the rare examples. But I think you're right. It's one of those things where you know ... You know, like for me with desserts, right? It's like if the dessert isn't near me, I'm not tempted to go to the bakery and buy a cookie. But if you put the cookies in front of me, I will devour all of them. And since we have this, like you said, in our computers, it's on our phones, in our pockets. It's everywhere. You're kind of just always, always going for that cookie, which is ... It's tough. I mean, it's tough to balance. You talked about three principles of digital minimalism in your book, which I thought were very good at laying a foundation for some of the things I wanted to ask you next. So can you outline what those three principles were?

Cal: Sure. So I'll give you, just quickly, first, the elevator pitch of what digital minimalism is. And then I'll give the three principles that explain sort of why this should work. So digital minimalism is a philosophy of technology use, the idea being that most people find that just assorted tips and tricks are not enough to take back control of digital lives. What they really need is a real philosophy. And so digital minimalism is a philosophy of technology use that says wipe the slate clean of all this different stuff you use and clutters up your digital life. Figure out what really matters to me. What are the things that I really value? That are really important in my life? And then say, okay, for each of those, what's the best way to use technology to suppose that?

Cal: And let the answers to that question be basically the technology you use in your personal life. So you're using probably much less technology than most people, and the technology you are using, you're using in an optimal way for really, really specific, really high value, high ROI purposes, right? So that's digital minimalism. You focus intentionally on a very small number of ways to use technology that give you big returns. And then you ignore everything else.

Cal: And so the question is, people get uncomfortable about minimalism in general because this idea that you focus just on a small number of high value things, to the exclusion of many other things that might offer a little bit of value. This can be disconcerting for people. A lot of people think about this like walking to a room with a bunch of money on the floor, and saying, "Well, I'm just gonna pick up the high value bills and leave the rest." People think, "But you could also pick up the other money, and you would have even more money, right?"

Cal: So minimalism is a little bit uncomfortable for people. But there's really three reasons why it works. Why focusing on a small number of high value things and ignoring everything else can make you happier than trying to do more. And the three principles are, one, clutter is costly. So we tend to undervalue the sort of psychological cost of having a lot of different things pulling at our attention. So this definitely clear if we think

about physical minimalism. You know, when people have so much stuff in their house that they become a hoarder, it makes them feel really bad. Even though every little individual piece of garbage in their house has some small value, there's a reason they have it there, the overall cost of having so much clutter is way more negative. The same thing happens with your digital life. Even though every little app or service, you can point to some value, some circumstance in which its useful, or some nice thing it adds to your life. There's a huge negative cost to cluttering all of your time and attention with these things. So clutter has cost.

Cal: The second principle is that optimization is important. So a key idea of digital minimalism is, you're not just intentional about what technology you use. You're also very specific about how you use it. So you would never just say, "Hey, I need Facebook because it's how I organize my local community group. And that's really important to me. Community's really important." You would never just say, "So now I just use Facebook two hours a day on my phone." Right? A digital minimalist would say, "Okay, if that's what important, how am I gonna use Facebook? Well, I'm not gonna have it on my phone. It's just gonna be on my desktop. And I check in Sunday night for 20 minutes to see what's going on with my group." Right? They optimize how they use technology. And that can have a huge win. So when you start to optimize how you use things and not just have the binary question of, "Do I use this app or not? Am I signed up for this service or not?" you get huge advantages.

Cal: And then the final principle for why minimalism can make you better off is that intentionality trumps convenience. So often people get such a large infusion of satisfaction and meaning from being really intentional and careful about what they do in their life, that far outweighs the little conveniences or things that they've lost by the clutter they've cleared out. So those three principles add up to explain why this idea of becoming much more focused and careful about what you use and how you use it in your digital life really can leave you feeling much more happy and much more satisfied, even though you're technically now missing out on a lot of little small things that maybe in isolation could bring you little small value.

Jacob: I like the hoarder analogy. I think that makes a lot of sense. So let's say somebody were to stop you on the street as you are going to grab a cup of coffee. And they say, "Hey, you wrote that book Digital Minimalism." And they didn't read the book yet. But they wanted to know, "Why digital minimalism? Why is this so important? Why is this something that people need to practice and pay attention to, and think about?"

Cal: Well, what I was hearing from people is that they have this problem. They're not happy with their digital lives. It's not that any one thing they use in isolation is bad. It's not that any one of these things is smoking or something, where it's just clear cut. Like, "I just wish I wasn't doing this." But the cumulative effect is significantly decreasing the quality of their lives. And they're finding that the standard approach, which is assorted tips and tricks, is just not working. Right? The idea of like, "Well, turn off notifications." Or, "Oh, I've got an idea. Do a digital Shabbat, where you don't use your phone on Saturdays," or-

Jacob: I've heard of that.

Cal: Exactly. Like, "Let's just have assorted tips and tricks." It's just not working, right? Just the consistent, relentless pull at your attention of this phone in your pocket overwhelms those things. And so what became clear to me is that what's needed is a full philosophy. Just like when it came to health, right? When we had processed food arrive in the mid-20th century, we started to see that Americans were getting unhealthy and really obese, and getting a lot of heart disease and diabetes. And tips, like, "Try to move more," or, "Try to eat healthier." Hey, that didn't solve the problem. I mean, if you know anyone who's in really good shape or is really healthy, almost certainly it's because they have a really clear and aggressive philosophy of health and fitness that they follow. They're vegan. Or they're Paleo. Or they're a cross-fit fanatic. Right? You know, tips don't do it. You need to have a whole system of belief that you can buy into if you're really gonna make lasting change on hard things.

Cal: And so this digital minimalism idea, it turns out this is what people are doing. I mean, I didn't invent the idea. I just popularized the term. But there's this whole movement of people out there who are saying, "Enough is enough. I don't want Mark Zuckerberg telling me how to spend my time. I wanna figure out what's important to me. If I can find ways that technology could help those things, I will use it in that way. But for the most part, I'm taking back control of my time outside of work. And I'm gonna put it towards things that really matter." And it's a movement. And it's a like a rebellion. It's a rebellion against this idea that these small number of companies in Norther California should really dictate how we spend our time, and how we feel, and how we think. And people say, "I wanna create my own life, and I'll use technology on my own damn terms." Right?

Cal: And that's digital minimalism. And there's this growing movement that's doing it. And I found that out there and said, "I gotta write about this. I gotta popularize it. I gotta figure out why it works. And I gotta spread it to as many people as possible."

Jacob: I've been trying, actually, pretty hard to ... You know, as somebody that works for himself, when I first started getting involved with what I'm doing, with speaking, with writing, all that sort of stuff, I had to be on social media all the time. But now, as the business grew, and I was able to expand, I have a team of people that I work with. And so I tried to set up specific rules for myself. And you can let me know if these would fall under the tips and tricks, or if these are kind of more substantial rules. So I only check email once a day at 4:00. I mean, I mean, I have an assistant that I work with. So going back to your idea, you said if you're at Google, you have an assistant to check all the emails for all the engineers. So I definitely put that into practice, for sure.

Jacob: And that has been huge for me. Just knowing that I don't need to check my email every five seconds has been a huge relief. And then I also only check social media stuff once a day, at the same time when I check email, which is at 4:00 everyday. And then I also try to put in place, no meetings on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Of course, no technology during dinner or meal time, stuff like that. And after I put some of these rules in place for myself, I've personally noticed a huge impact in terms of productivity, in terms of just overall happiness. I don't know. I feel like it absolutely has made a difference.

Cal: Yeah. Well, the fact that you have structure. The fact that you're engaging ... It sounds like you're engaging with sort of the most distracting of these tools on your computer and not your phone.

Jacob: Oh yeah, I don't-

Cal: These are classic minimalist moves.

Jacob: Yeah. No, I mean, I have the apps on my phone. And the reason why I have them there is, if I'm ever traveling, and I wanna do a video for a Facebook group that I run or something like that, I have the option to do that. But I don't have any of the notifications on there. I never check any of the social media stuff on there. You know, maybe once every couple of months. Like I said, if I'm traveling and there's something ... If I'm with an executive at a conference, and I wanna do a Facebook Live, I like knowing that I have the app. I can just open it up and do kind of a Facebook Live. But never checking any of that stuff on there. And it's because I used to a lot. I used to check email all the time, check social media stuff all the time. On my phone, on my computer. And my whole day would go by, and I would just look at all the tasks that I was supposed to do and be like, "I have done nothing. I don't know where my day went." And it was in social media and email and just sending those to people. It was crazy.

Cal: Yeah. It happens so easy. It definitely happens so easy. So what you're doing there does sound really minimalist. And what you're experiencing is very common. It's a profound ... I mean, it's hard to put in words. I mean, you'll be better doing it than I can. But there's this profound difference in feeling, when you have sort of eliminated this sort of all you can eat buffet that follows you in your pocket, of semi-personalized intermittently reinforced stimuli. And when you take that out of your life, it just feels so different. I think there's so many adults out there, especially sort of millennials. So people that got this in college or before, and have had it their whole adult lives.

Cal: There's this low grade background hum of anxiety that so much of our population is feeling they just think this is normal. To the point that when it goes away, when they go minimalist and intentional and take most of this stuff out of their life or get much more controlled about it, when it goes away, it's like, "Whoa. What drug did I just take?" You know? It's hard to put into words sometimes, how profound of a positive change it is when you decouple your mind from this artificial stimuli machine and start engaging with the world again. And people love it. You know? And I think that's why this minimalism idea is spreading really, really wide in the digital space, is because you get a really, really cool benefit once you actually do it.

Jacob: Yeah, I mean, for me it felt like, with social media and with email all the time, I felt like somebody was constantly standing on my chest. You know, you always feel this pressure of you have to check, you have to respond, you have to like ... And then once I stopped doing that, you just kind of felt relaxed. Like, you can go for a walk with your dogs and not have your phone with you. And what's really interesting is that when you're around other people who are constantly checking their phones, and you know, you're at dinner, they have their phone on the table. You look at them and you're like,

"Oh my God. What is wrong with you?" But then you're sort of like, "Wait. That used to be me." And so, I used to be that person where ...

Jacob: Anyway, that's just how I felt after going through that process. But what's really interesting is, when I talk to people about this, they say, "Oh, I can't do that. You have an assistant. I can't get an assistant." Or, "You don't check social media, but I have to check it at work because I'm constantly getting pinged by my boss, and we're always on Slack." And so, how do you do that for ... For, let's say, somebody who is working in an organization, and they say, "You know what? I can't do this, Cal. I got emails. My boss is messaging me. I got Slack messages." How do you start to implement some of these concepts of digital minimalism, if you can?

Cal: Well, start with your personal life. So the book, for example, is focused primarily on life outside of work. So like, in *Deep Work*, I get into ways you can work with your boss or your manager and create a work day that has more unbroken space for concentration and how to handle some of these shallow obligations. But something I've noticed is that if you get your house in order in your personal life, you'd be surprised by the way it just changes your experience of work the next day. And so the first thing I'd recommend to people is, okay, start with the stuff you can control, which is what you're doing on your phone and on your tablets outside of work. *Digital Minimalism*, the book, will walk you through how to do a 30-day digital declutter, in which you wipe the slate clean, not of work stuff, but of optional personal technology. So stuff that you use for entertainment, distraction, connection in your personal life. You wipe the slate clean. You step away from it for 30 days. During that period, you reflect on what's important to you, what really matters. You experiment, you get back out there, you try the old analog hobbies you'd forgotten.

Cal: And then when the 30 days are over, you say, "Anything I left back into my digital life has to earn its way back in. There has to be a very compelling reason for it to be there. And I have to have a set of rules for how I'm gonna use it." Right? So do that first. Clean up your digital house at home. And the clarity, and the peace, and satisfaction that gives you, the increase in your comfort with boredom and concentration, all of this is gonna give you immediate benefits in the professional space. And then start from that foundation, then you can step back and say, "Okay, how am I gonna try to reconfigure, renegotiate, or nudge my work situation to get away from more of this. So start with the persona, and then we can talk about what to do in the professional.

Jacob: What about some of the ... You know, there are some social media pundits out there that say, "Actually, more social media is good." I've heard examples of some people say, "Back in the day, in the '20s, '30s, '40s, everybody used to sit around the breakfast table and read their newspaper. And they weren't interacting with each other. They were reading paper. And now, instead of reading the paper, they're just looking at their phone. What's the difference?" So what do you say to people that genuinely believe that more technology is good, it's just a new way of doing stuff?

Cal: Well, I think the social internet is an actual innovation that has, and is gonna continue to have, profound positive impacts on our culture. And by the social internet, I just mean the internet and the ability to use the internet to connect with people, express yourself,

and find interesting ideas. What I object to is this idea that we need to consolidate the social internet behind the walled gardens of a small number of massive private companies. That's what Facebook is trying to do. Facebook is to the social internet what AOL was to the world wide web in the 1990s. They're coming around and saying, "Look, you guys are too stupid to use the internet and the web, and to be out there in the wild decentralized web and express yourself and find interesting ideas and people. You need to come in our walled gardens, where you have an account with us, and we make the experience very easy. We'll have algorithms kind of figure out what you need to look at. Don't worry. We'll just feed it to you. You can just sort of sit there, like in WALL-E, the Pixar movie, the people up at the space station.

Jacob: That's exactly what I was thinking of when you said that.

Cal: Yeah. You just sit there. Don't worry about it. Just like AOL used to be. And eventually, people were like, "Hey, this is training wheels. I can use the world wide web. I don't need AOL." Right? Well, Facebook's just AOL. Like, "Oh, you can't go on the internet. You can understand blogs and websites and personal servers. And things are kind of ugly. And the interfaces aren't clean. You need to be in our walled garden. And, you know, hey, we'll watch everything you do. And we'll use that to target advertisements toward you. But don't worry about that. This is just, you need to be in here. This is the training wheel internet."

Cal: And I think it's nonsense. When you try to consolidate the social internet into a small number of private companies, terrible things happen. That's what we've seen. Of course there's gonna be huge privacy concerns. You have a company that has a billion users, and a \$500 billion valuation that needs to make huge amounts of profits. Of course they're gonna do terrible things with your data. I mean, of course there's going to be issues with censorship and bias and this and that because you're trying to run the whole internet through a private company. That makes no sense. It's against the whole idea that made the internet so exciting in the first place.

Cal: So I think the internet, in particular, the social internet, is a beautiful innovation. But I think we had the basic ideas, the HTML, the hyperlink, the personal website, the blog. The other types of protocols that existed out there. Email protocols. These things have been around for a while. These are the magic technologies. You know, I used to work a floor above, when I was at MIT, Tim Berners-Lee, the person who invented the world wide web. He had it right. The internet is this wonderful decentralized wild place that can support all of these great things. And I don't mean to rant. But it is kind of my rant, is I love that. And I hate the idea that we have to put all of the internet into these Orwellian training wheels souped up AOL-style walled gardens.

Cal: That's not gonna work. It's against the entire idea of the internet. As a computer scientist and technologist, it sort of offends most of the ideas that I think are exciting about modern technology. And so it's a really long answer to a short question. But basically, I like the internet. And I have very little stake or interest in sort of supporting the stock price of Facebook. And so I think we can have a vibrant technological culture without all having to log into Mark Zuckerberg's servers.

Jacob: I think a lot of people would agree with you, actually. So let's say you were the President of the Internet, so to speak, if such a thing existed. Would you just delete things like Facebook and Twitter, and just make them no more? Or how would you change them? I don't know if you've given any thought to this. It's kind of a hard question to answer. But what would you, I guess, like to see happen, if anything with some of these big tech companies?

Cal: I'm not a big supporter of the idea that action needs to be taken, in the sense of, "Okay, we need strict regulations. We need to get rid of these companies." What I think we really need is cultural change. And that's what I'm trying to do with a book like Digital Minimalism. I think people are getting increasingly fed up with these mega-platforms. And they're looking for an alternative. And I think philosophies like digital minimalism are offering alternatives. A year and half ago, when I was doing research for the book, for example, I had this digital declutter process, and I wanted to run a few people through it, just to kind of kick the tires a little bit and clear out the cobwebs. And so I sent out a note and said, "Is anyone interested in doing this thing? And it's gonna be pretty drastic. And you're gonna have to stop using all technology in your personal life for a month."

Cal: And I thought I would get like 100 people maybe, if I was lucky. I was like, "Yeah, I'm gonna talk to all of them. It'll be great. 1600 people signed up. 1600 people were like, "Yeah, I wanna leave all technology for a month. Just volunteering to do it. The New York Times wrote a whole profile about it. There's this energy out there. I think people are fed up. But what they need is alternatives. And so I'm a big believer in cultural shifts. I mean, I think these services, the big, addictive services that try to get you to look at your phone are completely dispensable, completely optional, and are not necessary to be a part of vibrant technologically advanced future.

Cal: And I think that message is getting out there in the past couple of years. And so I'm hoping with digital minimalism, not that everyone will adopt this philosophy, but that just like the very first books on aerobics and jogging or vegetarian diets sort of broke the dam that, "Oh, we should have named fitness movements and named diet movements." That it'll sort of break the dam where people start thinking about, "Well, what is the name for the approach I wanna take to my digital life?" Right? I mean, that people start thinking about, philosophically speaking, what do I really want out of my digital life? That we leave this sort of default phase of just trying things that seem interesting. And I really believe that just, the culture is gonna shift away from these really large platforms. And we're gonna move back toward sort of the more wild and fun decentralized version of the web that we started with.

Jacob: I hope so. I hope so. I can only hope so. I'm sure a lot of people listening to this probably would hope for that as well. I know we only have a couple of minutes left. So I just had maybe one or two questions for you. You talked about culture, and that we need a change in culture. I don't know if you have any thoughts on this idea of the hustle culture that's been going on, this idea that, especially if you're an entrepreneur, you need to be 24/7. You need to be everywhere all the time. You gotta be on all social platforms. You gotta be messaging people like non-stop. I would imagine that that kind of a hustle culture and mentality is probably also fueling maybe some of this nonstop

use of social media. I don't know if you would agree with that, or if you think those two things are intertwined at all?

Cal: I think that's actually a good observation. The hustle culture predates sort of the widespread use of social media we see today. But social media provided a really good outlet for it. And I actually wrote a book about this topic. So between my student books and before *Deep Work*, before I really started tackling technology, I wrote this book in 2012 called *So Good They Can't Ignore You*. And it's a career book. I wrote this as I was sort of entering the academic market, so it was on my mind. And the basic premise in this book is, I was trying to understand how do people end up really liking what they do? Really passionate about their work, really satisfied with their work. And what I found is that almost always, the answer was they worked really hard to develop rare and valuable skills. And that if you can do something that's rare and valuable, you gain massive control over your work life, and you can shape it in ways that's massively satisfying and impactful and successful and something that you really, really love. This is really ...

Cal: If people are really passionate about their work, it's rarely because they figured out when they were 18, like, "I have a passion for this," and they followed their passion. It's almost always they build rare and valuable skills. It's by far the most important currency in entrepreneurship, but in many other fields as well. And so I've been a long proponent that hustling for hustling's sake doesn't do anything. You should be relentlessly focusing on honing skills that rare and valuable. Doing that sort of hard work on, you know, proverbial pull-up bar at 4:30 in morning type work to get better at something that people value. And if that's the hustle, which is an incredibly focused and diligent hustle, something that has very little to do with social media, has very little to do with lots of coffees or hopping on calls. That type of really intense focus on, "I'm gonna do this this that's really valuable, really well. I'm gonna apprentice myself and get really good at it. And I'm gonna put in the hard work to get good at it." That is almost like the magic elixir for career satisfaction. At least, that was the premise of that book.

Cal: And so for people ... You know, I wrote an article about this, which is kind of interesting because this was the turning point, I think. This is when I really started noticing ... This was kind of the end of the sort of naïve social media age. I wrote this article back in 2016 for the *New York Times* that was saying, "Social media is not as important for your career as you think it is." That was the premise. And I got a lot of hate mail for that. And I say that's the turning point because I think like six months later, after that, I gave a talk called *Quit Social Media* that got viewed like five million times. The culture changed somewhere right around that point, right? 2016.

Cal: So I'd written this column about it, where basically I said, "All this stuff you're doing on social media, there's no evidence that that's really gonna make a difference. What really matters is, can you do something really well?" And if you can, I can guarantee you that almost certainly there's an audience and a consumer base out there that is desperate for people that do that thing well. They'll find you. Right? Social media, widespread social media use is five years old. These fields have been around longer than five years. They know how to identify and reward talent. Get good. Get really good at things that

matter. Your Instagram follower count, who cares? What can you do that's really good? What's really valuable? That's the way the job market operates.

Cal: I mean, there's a lot of other, obviously, subtleties. But sort of the core mechanism there is, what do you do? How valuable is it? How rare is it? That's the whole ball game. I'm kind of curmudgeonly on that. But I'm always out there yelling at kids on my lawn like, "Go focus on something. Get really good." It's really the elixir. Get off Facebook and Instagram, trying to create an online brand. And instead, let people online crow about this thing that you can do really well.

Jacob: Yeah, I love that approach. Well, last question for you to wrap up. Well, I'll kind of combine two questions. One is, are you worried about the future of this, with kind of augmented with virtual reality, more wearable devices? Because I would imagine that that ... We haven't even talked about what would happen if you get stuck in a virtual world. And second part is, for people listening to this podcast who are like, "You know what? Cal, you convinced me. What are some practical things that I could do right after listening to this podcast, to start introducing digital minimalism?" What would you say that they should be doing?

Cal: Starting with the practical, I would say that the smallest thing you can do, if you just wanna get a taste of digital minimalism, is essentially take everything off your phone. Every app except for the built-in ones, right? I mean, any social media app, any news app, any game. Anything that feeds you sort arresting information. Take it all off your phone. If you think at all you can get away with taking your email off your phone, do that as well. I accidentally deleted my Gmail app at some point. You know, like I think I pressed the button too long and actually hit the 'x'. And I didn't think I could get away with it. It turns out I could. It's been great. Take everything off your phone. You're not losing access to it. You still have your laptop or your desktop. You can still use it if you need to use it. But not having immediate access to all of these things can be a big difference.

Cal: I would say the second sort of slightly more strong step you could take I guess is buy my book. There's like a \$15 step you can take. I mean, obviously, I get into all this. And then the big step is, if you really wanna get minimalist is the digital declutter. I mean, this is the initiation, right? As I've said, there's been a couple of thousand people now who have gone through it and reported back to me it works really, really well. And I go into it in more detail in the book. But the basic idea is pretty straightforward. You leave all optional technology in your personal life for 30 days. It's not a detox. You don't go back to everything when you're done. You're actually wiping the slate clean. And then after the 30 days are over, you only let things back in that pass a really high bar. Like, "This is really serving something I really value. And you have rules for you use it." That's the final initiation you wanna get to if you wanna enter digital minimalism. And it's really, really effective. So I definitely highly recommend it.

Cal: And in terms of the future, there's things to be worried about. There's things to be excited about. As a computer scientist, I think augmented reality is gonna be the future. Just economically speaking, when we get to a point where I can basically project in front of you a screen of any size, that you can interact with, there'll be no reason for there to

be any other hardware in your life. Right? So that's the economic drive that says augmented reality is gonna eat the whole hardware industry once they get the technology good enough. Why would I own a computer or a phone if I could just make a large computer screen appear in front of me whenever I want. And I can type on a virtual keyboard, and it'll feel like a keyboard wherever I am. Or I can make a widescreen TV show up on any wall I want.

Cal: So augmented reality is going to devour the hardware world. And so we should be worried. I mean, this is why you probably wanna be a pretty strong minimalist before this happens. Because if you're not, if you're still sort of feeding off the attention economy teet, just sort of signing up for things that are useful and letting it distract you, in the world of augmented reality, it's gonna be 100% inescapable. And so now is probably the time to get your digital act together. To figure out what am I doing with my life, what's important, get very used to this idea of deploying technology strategically to solve specific problems. If you do that, you'll be ready for what's coming down the pike. If you don't do that, we're back to scene from WALL-E again. That's where you're gonna end up probably.

Jacob: Not a happy place.

Cal: Not a happy place.

Jacob: Well, Cal, we've been chatting for just over an hour now. Where can people go to find your book? I know the advance copy here I have says it's coming out February 5th, which by the time most people listening to this podcast ... Well, by the time they listen to the podcast, the book should be out. So I'm assuming it's available wherever books are sold?

Cal: Yeah, it's available wherever books are sold. And also, CalNewport.com. That's where I've been blogging since, I don't know, over a decade now. And so if you wanna find out more about the book or just spend some time with these type of ideas, you go to CalNewport.com, and there's plenty of articles to read there. But as stated, the one place you're not gonna find me is on social media. So I apologize in advance that there's no way for you send a tweet my direction or click "like" on a post.

Jacob: Oh, man. Shame on you, Cal. Shame on you. It's all right. We got the blog. And the book is great. So I read an advance copy of it, which is fantastic. So thanks for being a guest. And thanks everyone for tuning in. Make sure to check out Cal's book and his website. He's probably one of the few people out there that are not on social media. But hopefully, after listening to this, maybe we'll have fewer people on social media, and spending more time doing other things. So thanks again, Cal, for being a guest. And thanks everyone for tuning in. Again, the book is Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World. And I will see all of you next week.