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Packed schedules
Super busy
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Unrealistic deadlines
Can't sleep
Sunday afternoon emails
No time to think
Stuck at the office
All-nighters
Chat's blowing up

**IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE
CRAZY AT WORK**

Jason Fried

It Doesn't Have to Be Crazy at Work

«HarperCollins»

Fried J.

It Doesn't Have to Be Crazy at Work / J. Fried — «HarperCollins»,

Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson, the authors of the New York Times bestseller *Rework*, are back with a manifesto to combat all your modern workplace worries and fears. *It Doesn't Have to Be Crazy at Work* is a direct successor to *Rework*, the instant bestseller that showed readers a new path to working effectively. Now Fried and Heinemeier Hansson have returned with a new strategy for the ideal company culture – what they call “the calm company”. It is a direct attack on the chaos, anxiety and stress that plagues millions of workplaces and billions of people working their day jobs. Working to breaking point with long hours, excessive workload, and a lack of sleep have become a badge of honour for many people these days, when it should be a mark of stupidity. This isn't just a problem for large organisations; individuals, contractors and solopreneurs are burning themselves out in the very same way. As the authors reveal, the answer isn't more hours. Rather, it's less waste and fewer things that induce distraction, always-on anxiety and stress. It is time to stop celebrating crazy and start celebrating calm. Fried and Hansson have the proof to back up their argument. "Calm" has been the cornerstone of their company's culture since Basecamp began twenty years ago. Destined to become the management guide for the next generation, *It Doesn't Have to Be Crazy at Work* is a practical and inspiring distillation of their insights and experiences. It isn't a book telling you what to do. It's a book showing you what they've done—and how any manager or executive no matter the industry or size of the company, can do it too.

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Jason Fried, David Heinemeier Hansson It Doesn't Have to Be Crazy at Work

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BY JASON FRIED AND DAVID HEINEMEIER HANSSON OF BASECAMP



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Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson assert the moral right to be identified as the authors of this work

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Dedication

From Jason Fried:

To my family, to opportunity, and to luck—I'm fortunate to have you. Love and thanks.

From David Heinemeier Hansson:

To Jamie, Colt, and Dash for the love that gives patience and perspective to seek calm at work.

First

It's crazy at work

How often have you heard someone say “It’s crazy at work”? Maybe you’ve even said it yourself. For many, “It’s crazy at work” has become their normal. But why so crazy?

There are two primary reasons: (1) The workday is being sliced into tiny, fleeting work moments by an onslaught of physical and virtual distractions. And (2) an unhealthy obsession with growth at any cost sets towering, unrealistic expectations that stress people out.

It’s no wonder people are working longer, earlier, later, on weekends, and whenever they have a spare moment. People can’t get work done at work anymore. That turns life into work’s leftovers. The doggie bag.

What’s worse is that long hours, excessive busyness, and lack of sleep have become a badge of honor for many people these days. Sustained exhaustion is not a badge of honor, it’s a mark of stupidity.

And it’s not just about organizations—individuals, contractors, and solopreneurs are burning themselves out in the very same way.

You’d think that with all the hours people are putting in, and all the promises of new technologies, the load would be lessening. It’s not. It’s getting heavier.

But the thing is, there’s not more work to be done all of a sudden. The problem is that there’s hardly any uninterrupted, dedicated time to do it. People are working more but getting less done. It doesn’t add up—until you account for the majority of time being wasted on things that don’t matter.

Out of the 60, 70, or 80 hours a week many people are expected to pour into work, how many of those hours are really spent on the work itself? And how many are tossed away in meetings, lost to distraction, and withered away by inefficient business practices? The bulk of them.

The answer isn’t more hours, it’s less bullshit. Less waste, not more production. And far fewer distractions, less always-on anxiety, and avoiding stress.

Stress is passed from organization to employee, from employee to employee, and then from employee to customer. Stress never stops at the border of work, either. It bleeds into life. It infects your relationships with your friends, your family, your kids.

The promises keep coming. More time-management hacks. More ways to communicate. And new demands keep piling up. To pay attention to more conversations in more places, to respond within minutes. Faster and faster, for what?

If it’s constantly crazy at work, we have two words for you: Fuck that. And two more: Enough already.

It’s time for companies to stop asking their employees to breathlessly chase ever-higher, ever-more-artificial targets set by ego. It’s time to give people the uninterrupted time that great work demands. It’s time to stop celebrating crazy at work.

For nearly 20 years we’ve been working at making Basecamp a calm company. One that isn’t fueled by stress, or ASAP, or rushing, or late nights, or all-nighter crunches, or impossible promises, or high turnover, or consistently missed deadlines, or projects that never seem to end.

No growth-at-all-costs. No false busyness. No ego-driven goals. No keeping up with the Joneses Corporation. No hair on fire. And yet we’ve been profitable every year we’ve been in business.

We’re in one of the most competitive industries in the world. In addition to tech giants, the software industry is dominated by startups backed by hundreds of millions of dollars in venture capital. We’ve taken zero. Where does our money come from? Customers. Call us old-fashioned.

As a software company, we're supposed to be playing the hustle game in Silicon Valley, but we don't have a single employee in the Valley. In fact, our staff of 54 is spread out across about 30 different cities around the world.

We put in about 40 hours a week most of the year and just 32 in the summer. We send people on month-long sabbaticals every three years. We not only pay for people's vacation time, we pay for the actual vacation, too.

No, not 9 p.m. Wednesday night. It can wait until 9 a.m. Thursday morning. No, not Sunday. Monday.

Are there occasionally stressful moments? Sure—such is life. Is every day peachy? Of course not—we'd be lying if we said it was. But we do our best to make sure those are the exceptions. On balance we're calm—by choice, by practice. We're intentional about it. We've made different decisions from the rest.

We've designed our company differently. We're here to tell you about the choices we've made and why we've made many of them. There's a path for any company willing to make similar choices. You've got to want it, but if you do you'll realize it's much nicer over here. You can have a calm company, too.

The modern workplace is sick. Chaos should not be the natural state at work. Anxiety isn't a prerequisite for progress. Sitting in meetings all day isn't required for success. These are all perversions of work—side effects of broken models and follow-the-lemming-off-the-cliff worst practices. Step aside and let the suckers jump.

Calm is protecting people's time and attention.

Calm is about 40 hours of work a week.

Calm is reasonable expectations.

Calm is ample time off.

Calm is smaller.

Calm is a visible horizon.

Calm is meetings as a last resort.

Calm is asynchronous first, real-time second.

Calm is more independence, less interdependence.

Calm is sustainable practices for the long term.

Calm is profitability.

A quick bit about us

We're Jason and David. We've been running Basecamp together since 2003. Jason is CEO, David is CTO, and we're the only two Cs at the company.

Basecamp is both the name of our company and the name of our product. The Basecamp product is a unique cloud-based application that helps companies organize all their projects and internal communications in one place. When everything's in Basecamp, people know what they need to do, everyone knows where everything is, it's easy to see where things stand, and nothing slips through the cracks.

We've experimented a lot with how we run our business. In this book we share what's worked for us, along with observations and realizations about what makes for a healthy, long-term, sustainable business. As with all advice, your mileage may vary. Take these ideas as inspiration for change, not as some sort of divine doctrine.

Lastly, we use the word "crazy" in this book in the same way people use crazy to describe the crazy traffic at rush hour, the crazy weather outside, and the crazy line at the airport. When we say crazy, we're calling situations crazy, not people.

With that, let's get started.

Your company is a product

It begins with this idea: Your company is a product.

Yes, the things you make are products (or services), but your company is the thing that makes those things. That's why your company should be your best product.

Everything in this book revolves around that idea. That, like product development, progress is achieved through iteration. If you want to make a product better, you have to keep tweaking, revising, and iterating. The same thing is true with a company.

But when it comes to companies, many stand still. They might change what they make, but how they make it stays the same. They choose a way to work once and stick with it. Whatever workplace fad is hot when they get started becomes ingrained and permanent. Policies are set in cement. Companies get stuck with themselves.

But when you think of the company as a product, you ask different questions: Do people who work here know how to use the company? Is it simple? Complex? Is it obvious how it works? What's fast about it? What's slow about it? Are there bugs? What's broken that we can fix quickly and what's going to take a long time?

A company is like software. It has to be usable, it has to be useful. And it probably also has bugs, places where the company crashes because of bad organizational design or cultural oversights.

When you start to think about your company as a product, all sorts of new possibilities for improvement emerge. When you realize the way you work is malleable, you can start molding something new, something better.

We work on projects for six weeks at a time, then we take two weeks off from scheduled work to roam and decompress. We didn't simply theorize that would be the best way to work. We started by working on things for as long as they took. Then we saw how projects never seemed to end. So we started time-boxing at three months. We found that was still too long. So we tried even shorter times. And we ended up here, in six-week cycles. We iterated our way to what works for us. We'll talk all about this in the book.

We didn't just assume asynchronous communication is better than real-time communication most of the time. We figured it out after overusing chat tools for years. We discovered how the distractions went up and the work went down. So we figured out a better way to communicate. We'll talk all about this in the book.

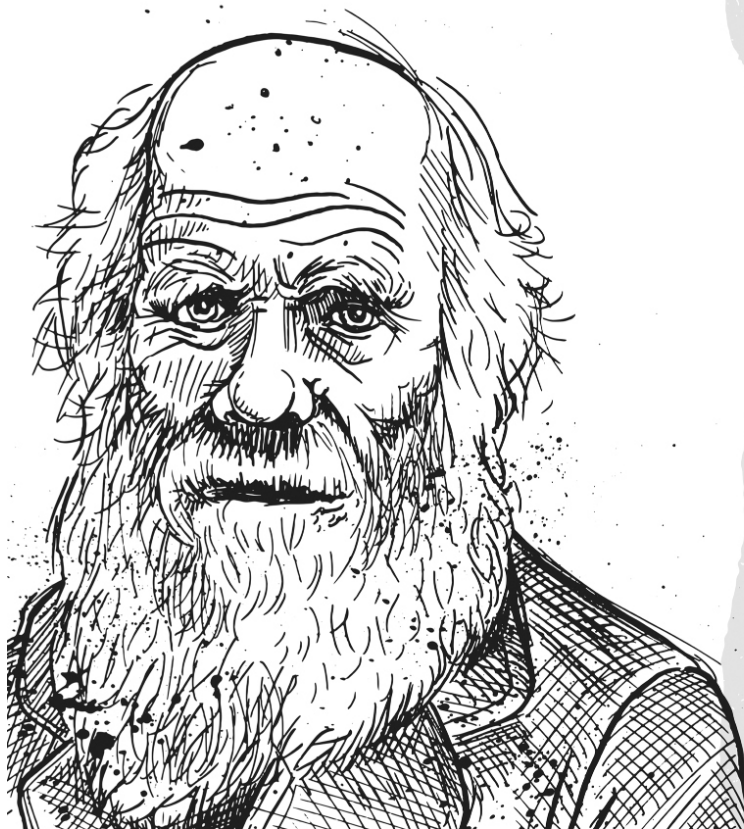
We didn't launch with the benefits we have today. We worked our way toward them. We didn't realize paying for people's vacations was better than cash bonuses. We started with the latter and realized that bonuses were just taken as an expected part of pay, anyway. We applied that experience to other benefits. We'll talk all about this in the book.

We didn't start with a calm approach to salary negotiations; we worked our way here. Setting salaries and granting raises was as stressful at Basecamp as it is at most other companies. Until we iterated our way to a new method. We'll talk all about this in the book.

We work on our company as hard as we work on our products. People often toss a version number at the end of software. "This is iOS 10.1, 10.2, 10.5, 11, etc...." We think of our company in the same way. Today's Basecamp, LLC, is like version 50.3 of Basecamp, LLC. We got here by going there, trying that, and figuring out what works best.

Running a calm company is, unfortunately, not the default way to run a company these days. You have to work against your instincts for a while. You have to put toxic industry norms aside. You have to recognize that "It's crazy at work" isn't right. Calm is a destination and we'll share with you how we got there and stay there.

Our company is a product. We want you to think of yours as one, too. Whether you own it, run it, or "just" work there, it takes everyone involved to make it better.



BRITISH NATURALIST CHARLES DARWIN PUBLISHED 19 BOOKS, INCLUDING "ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES," WHILE WORKING JUST 4.5 HOURS A DAY.

Curb Your Ambition

Bury the hustle

Hustlemania has captured a monopoly on entrepreneurial inspiration. This endless stream of pump-me-up quotes about working yourself to the bone. It's time to snap out of it.

Just have a look at the #entrepreneur tag on Instagram. "Legends are born in a valley of struggle!"; "You don't have to be ridiculously gifted, you just have to be ridiculously committed"; and "Your goals don't care how you feel." Yeah, it just keeps going like this until you're ready to puke.

The hustle may have started as a beacon for those with little to outsmart those with a lot, but now it's just synonymous with *the grind*.

And for everyone in that tiny minority that somehow finds what they're looking for in the grind, there are so many more who end up broken, wasted, and burned out with nothing to show for it. And for what?

You aren't more worthy in defeat or victory because you sacrificed everything. Because you kept pushing through the pain and exhaustion for a bigger carrot. The human experience is so much more than 24/7 hustle to the max.

It's also just bad advice. You're not very likely to find that key insight or breakthrough idea north of the 14th hour in the day. Creativity, progress, and impact do not yield to brute force.

Now this opposition mainly comes from a lens focused on the world of creative people. The writers, the programmers, the designers, the makers, the product people. There are probably manual-labor domains where greater input does equal greater output, at least for a time.

But you rarely hear about people working three low-end jobs out of necessity wearing that grind with pride. It's only the pretenders, those who aren't exactly struggling for subsistence, who feel the need to brag about their immense sacrifice.

Entrepreneurship doesn't have to be this epic tale of cutthroat survival. Most of the time it's way more boring than that. Less jumping over exploding cars and wild chase scenes, more laying of bricks and applying another layer of paint.

So you hereby have our permission to bury the hustle. To put in a good day's work, day after day, but nothing more. You can play with your kids and still be a successful entrepreneur. You can have a hobby. You can take care of yourself physically. You can read a book. You can watch a silly movie with your partner. You can take the time to cook a proper meal. You can go for a long walk. You can dare to be completely ordinary every now and then.

Happy pacifists

The business world is obsessed with fighting and winning and dominating and destroying. This ethos turns business leaders into tiny Napoleons. It's not enough for them to merely put their dent in the universe. No, they have to fucking own the universe.

Companies that live in such a zero-sum world don't "earn market share" from a competitor, they "conquer the market." They don't just serve their customers, they "capture" them. They "target" customers, employ a sales "force," hire "headhunters" to find new talent, pick their "battles," and make a "killing."

This language of war writes awful stories. When you think of yourself as a military commander who has to eliminate the enemy (your competition), it's much easier to justify dirty tricks and anything-goes morals. And the bigger the battle, the dirtier it gets.

Like they say, all's fair in love and war. Except this isn't love, and it isn't war. It's business.

Sadly, it's not easy to escape the business tropes of war and conquest. Every media outlet has a template for describing rival companies as warring factions. Sex sells, wars sell, and business battles serve as financial-page porn.

But that paradigm just doesn't make any sense to us.

We come in peace. We don't have imperial ambitions. We aren't trying to dominate an industry or a market. We wish everyone well. To get ours, we don't need to take theirs.

What's our market share? Don't know, don't care. It's irrelevant. Do we have enough customers paying us enough money to cover our costs and generate a profit? Yes. Is that number increasing every year? Yes. That's good enough for us. Doesn't matter if we're 2 percent of the market or 4 percent or 75 percent. What matters is that we have a healthy business with sound economics that work for us. Costs under control, profitable sales.

Further, as far as market share goes, you'd need to define the market size accurately to define your share of it. As of the printing of this book, we have more than 100,000 companies that pay on a monthly basis for Basecamp. And that generates tens of millions of dollars in annual profit for us. We're pretty sure that's barely a blip of the overall market and that's just fine with us. We're serving our customers well, and they're serving us well. That's what matters. Doubling, tripling, quadrupling our market share doesn't matter.

Lots of companies are driven by comparisons in general. Not just whether they're first, second, or third in their industry, but how they stack up feature for feature with their closest competitors. Who's getting which awards? Who's raising more money? Who's getting all the press? Why are they sponsoring that conference and not us?

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