

workout plan for night shift workers

Crafting a Sustainable Fitness Routine: A Workout Plan for Night Shift Workers

workout plan for night shift workers presents unique challenges, disrupting natural circadian rhythms and often leading to reduced energy levels and inconsistent schedules. Despite these hurdles, maintaining a regular fitness regimen is crucial for overall health, well-being, and mitigating potential health risks associated with shift work. This comprehensive guide delves into creating an effective and adaptable exercise strategy that prioritizes convenience, energy management, and long-term adherence. We will explore optimal timing for workouts, exercise types that complement shift work demands, and practical tips for staying motivated. Whether you're new to fitness or looking to revamp your current routine, this article provides the essential framework for a successful and sustainable workout plan tailored specifically for night shift professionals.

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Understanding the Challenges of Night Shift Work and Exercise

Night shift work inherently disrupts the body's natural sleep-wake cycle, known as the circadian rhythm. This disruption can lead to a cascade of physiological and psychological effects, including fatigue, impaired cognitive function, digestive issues, and increased risk of chronic diseases. For individuals striving to maintain a consistent exercise routine, these factors can present significant obstacles. The inherent fatigue often makes it difficult to muster the energy for physical activity, and irregular sleep patterns can leave individuals feeling drained and unmotivated. Furthermore, the social and practical implications of working non-traditional hours can limit access to gyms or daylight exercise opportunities, adding another layer of complexity to designing a feasible workout plan for night shift workers.

The misalignment between internal biological clocks and external demands creates a physiological state that is not conducive to peak physical performance or recovery. This means that even when a night shift worker attempts to exercise, they might not experience the same benefits as someone working a standard day schedule. Understanding these specific challenges is the foundational step in building a workout plan that is not only effective but also realistic and sustainable. It requires acknowledging that flexibility and adaptation are key, rather than rigidly adhering to traditional fitness paradigms.

Optimizing Workout Timing for Night Shift Schedules

Determining the optimal time to exercise is one of the most critical aspects of creating a successful workout plan for night shift workers. While there's no one-size-fits-all answer, several strategies can help maximize energy and minimize disruption. For many, exercising after their night shift, but before a substantial sleep period, can be beneficial. This allows the body to expend pent-up energy and can promote deeper, more restorative sleep. The key is to avoid exercising too close to the intended sleep time if it proves to be overly stimulating.

Post-Shift Workout Window

Working out immediately after completing a night shift can be an excellent way to transition from work mode to personal time. This timing can help release endorphins, combat the lingering fatigue from the shift, and prepare the body for sleep. It's essential to choose exercises that are energizing but not overly taxing, and to allow a buffer period before attempting to sleep. A light to moderate intensity workout can be ideal, focusing on movement and cardiovascular health without inducing significant stress.

Pre-Shift Power-Up

Alternatively, some night shift workers find success by exercising a few hours before their shift begins. This approach can boost energy levels, improve alertness, and mentally prepare them for the demands of their work. This timing can be particularly effective if the worker has a significant period of wakefulness before their shift begins. A well-timed workout can serve as a form of active wakefulness, making the transition into the work environment smoother and more productive.

During Downtime or Breaks

For those with less predictable schedules or limited time between shifts, incorporating short bursts of activity during downtime or designated breaks can be a highly effective strategy. This might involve simple bodyweight exercises, a brisk walk, or stretching. Even brief periods of movement can significantly impact energy levels and overall health, making this a vital component of a flexible workout plan for night shift workers.

Effective Exercise Strategies for Night Shift

Workers

The types of exercises chosen for a night shift worker's workout plan should be adaptable to varying energy levels and time constraints. Prioritizing efficiency and compound movements can ensure that individuals get the most benefit from their exercise sessions, even when time is limited. A balanced approach that includes cardiovascular exercise, strength training, and flexibility is crucial for overall health and preventing the negative impacts of shift work.

Cardiovascular Exercise for Stamina and Energy

Cardiovascular training is vital for maintaining heart health, boosting metabolism, and improving endurance, which can be particularly beneficial for combating the fatigue associated with night shifts. Activities like brisk walking, jogging, cycling, swimming, or using an elliptical machine are excellent options. The intensity and duration can be adjusted based on individual fitness levels and how the body feels on any given day. Aiming for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity per week is a general guideline that can be adapted.

Strength Training for Muscle Health and Metabolism

Building and maintaining muscle mass is crucial for metabolic health, bone density, and overall functional strength. Strength training can also help improve posture and alleviate some of the physical strain associated with certain night shift jobs. Bodyweight exercises, resistance bands, dumbbells, or weight machines can all be utilized. Focus on full-body workouts or a split routine that targets different muscle groups on different days. Exercises like squats, lunges, push-ups, pull-ups (or assisted pull-ups), rows, and planks are highly effective.

Flexibility and Mobility for Recovery and Injury Prevention

Incorporating stretching and mobility exercises is essential for promoting recovery, preventing injuries, and improving range of motion. After long periods of sitting or standing during a shift, dedicated time for stretching can alleviate muscle stiffness and reduce the risk of strain. Yoga, Pilates, or simply static and dynamic stretching can be beneficial. These practices can also aid in relaxation, which is crucial for preparing for sleep after a demanding night shift.

High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) for Time Efficiency

For those with very limited time, High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) can be an exceptionally efficient workout option. HIIT involves short bursts of intense exercise followed by brief recovery periods. This type of training can deliver significant cardiovascular and metabolic benefits in a much shorter timeframe compared to traditional steady-state cardio. Examples include sprints, burpees, jumping jacks, and mountain climbers performed in intervals. However, it's important to ensure adequate recovery and not overdo HIIT, especially when dealing with sleep deprivation.

Nutrition and Hydration for Enhanced Workout Performance

Proper nutrition and hydration are foundational pillars for any effective workout plan, but they take on an even greater importance for night shift workers. The body's natural cues for hunger and thirst can be altered by shift work, making it essential to be proactive. Fueling the body correctly before, during, and after workouts can significantly impact energy levels, recovery, and overall health outcomes.

Strategic Meal Timing

For night shift workers, meal timing often needs to be adjusted to align with their work and sleep schedule rather than traditional mealtimes. It's advisable to consume a balanced meal or snack 1-3 hours before a workout to provide sustained energy. For post-workout nutrition, aim for a combination of protein and carbohydrates within an hour or two of finishing to aid muscle repair and replenish glycogen stores. Avoiding heavy meals close to bedtime, even after an evening workout, is important for promoting sleep quality.

Hydration is Key

Dehydration can significantly impair workout performance and exacerbate fatigue, which are already common concerns for night shift workers. Staying consistently hydrated throughout the entire 24-hour cycle is paramount. Water should be the primary beverage. Carry a water bottle and sip regularly throughout the shift and during workout sessions. Electrolyte-rich beverages may be beneficial for longer or more intense workouts, but water is generally sufficient for most activities.

Nutrient-Dense Food Choices

Focusing on nutrient-dense foods will ensure the body receives the essential vitamins and minerals it needs to function optimally. This includes lean proteins, whole grains, healthy fats, and a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. These foods provide sustained energy and support recovery. Processed foods and excessive sugar intake should be minimized, as they can lead to energy crashes and negatively impact overall health.

Tips for Staying Motivated and Consistent

Maintaining motivation and consistency with a workout plan for night shift workers can be challenging due to the inherent disruptions to routine and energy levels. However, employing specific strategies can make a significant difference in long-term adherence and success. It's about building sustainable habits that fit into a non-traditional lifestyle.

Set Realistic Goals

Instead of aiming for drastic changes, start with small, achievable goals. This could be committing to a 20-minute workout three times a week or incorporating a 10-minute stretch routine daily. As you build momentum and confidence, you can gradually increase the intensity, duration, or frequency of your workouts. Celebrating small victories is crucial for maintaining morale.

Schedule Your Workouts

Treat your workout sessions with the same importance as a work meeting or a family commitment. Block out specific times in your schedule for exercise, even if it's just for 30 minutes. This proactive approach helps prevent workouts from being pushed aside by other demands. Experiment with different times of day to find what works best for your energy levels and workflow.

Find an Accountability Partner

Sharing your fitness goals with a friend, family member, or colleague can provide invaluable motivation and accountability. This could be someone else on the night shift, or someone who can check in on your progress. Knowing someone is expecting you to show up or report on your activity can be a powerful incentive.

Vary Your Workouts

Monotony can quickly lead to boredom and a loss of interest. Keeping your exercise routine fresh and engaging is key. Try different types of activities, explore new routes for walks or runs, or experiment with different workout videos. This variety not only keeps things interesting but also works different muscle groups and prevents plateaus.

Listen to Your Body

It's essential to be attuned to your body's signals. Some days, you may have more energy and be able to push harder. On other days, especially after a particularly demanding shift or poor sleep, a lighter, restorative workout or even a rest day might be more appropriate. Pushing too hard when your body is exhausted can lead to injury and burnout.

Create a Dedicated Workout Space

If possible, designate a specific area in your home for workouts. This could be a corner of a room or even just a mat on the floor. Having a dedicated space can help mentally separate your workout time from other activities and make it easier to get started. Ensure it's a comfortable and inviting environment.

Sample Workout Plans for Night Shift Workers

These sample workout plans are designed to be flexible and adaptable to the unique demands of night shift work. They offer different options based on available time and energy levels. Remember to adjust the intensity and duration to suit your personal fitness level and how you feel on any given day.

Option 1: Post-Shift Energizer (30-45 Minutes)

- Warm-up (5 minutes): Light jogging in place, arm circles, leg swings.
- Cardio (15-20 minutes): Brisk walking outdoors or on a treadmill, cycling at a moderate pace, or elliptical trainer.
- Strength (10-15 minutes): Bodyweight circuit – 3 rounds of 10-12 repetitions of squats, lunges, push-ups (on knees if needed), planks (hold for 30-60 seconds).
- Cool-down and Stretching (5 minutes): Static stretches for major muscle groups.

Option 2: Pre-Shift Power Boost (45-60 Minutes)

- Warm-up (10 minutes): Dynamic stretching, light cardio like jumping jacks or high knees.
- Strength Training (20-25 minutes): Focus on compound exercises with weights or resistance bands (if available). Examples: Goblet squats, dumbbell rows, overhead press, deadlifts (or Romanian deadlifts). Aim for 3 sets of 8-10 repetitions.
- Cardio (15-20 minutes): Steady-state cardio like running or cycling at a moderate to vigorous pace.
- Cool-down and Stretching (5-10 minutes): Full body static stretching.

Option 3: Short & Sweet Break Workouts (15-20 Minutes)

- Perform this circuit 2-3 times with minimal rest between exercises:
- Squats: 15 repetitions
- Push-ups: As many as possible (AMRAP)
- Jumping Jacks: 30 seconds
- Lunges (alternating legs): 10 repetitions per leg
- Plank: Hold for 30-60 seconds
- Burpees (optional, for higher intensity): 5-8 repetitions

These are just templates. Feel free to substitute exercises, adjust the number of repetitions, and modify the duration to create a workout plan for night shift workers that best fits your lifestyle and fitness goals. Consistency is more important than intensity when starting out.

Frequently Asked Questions About Workout Plan

for Night Shift Workers

Q: What is the best time of day for night shift workers to exercise?

A: The best time is highly individual and depends on personal energy levels and sleep patterns. Many find success exercising after their shift but before a significant sleep period, or a few hours before their shift begins. Experimentation is key to finding your optimal window.

Q: How can I stay motivated to work out when I'm tired from night shifts?

A: Motivation can be boosted by setting realistic goals, scheduling workouts, finding an accountability partner, varying your routine, and listening to your body. Focusing on the long-term health benefits can also be a strong motivator.

Q: What types of exercises are most effective for night shift workers?

A: A balanced approach including cardiovascular exercise, strength training, and flexibility is recommended. High-intensity interval training (HIIT) can be effective for time efficiency, but should be used judiciously.

Q: Is it okay to exercise close to when I need to sleep after a night shift?

A: For some individuals, moderate exercise can promote sleep. However, intense workouts too close to bedtime can be stimulating and interfere with sleep quality. Pay attention to how your body responds and adjust timing accordingly.

Q: How much water should a night shift worker drink when exercising?

A: Hydration is critical. Aim to drink water consistently throughout the day. Before, during, and after your workout, ensure you are adequately hydrated. Carry a water bottle and sip frequently.

Q: Can I still build muscle if I'm working nights?

A: Absolutely. Consistent strength training, combined with adequate protein intake and sufficient rest (as much as possible with night shifts), will allow you to build and maintain

muscle mass. Proper nutrition is crucial for muscle repair and growth.

Q: What if I can only fit in short workouts?

A: Short, consistent workouts are far better than no workouts. Even 15-20 minutes of focused activity, such as bodyweight circuits or a brisk walk, can provide significant health benefits and contribute to your overall fitness goals.

Q: How important is nutrition for a night shift worker's workout plan?

A: Nutrition is paramount. It fuels your workouts, aids in recovery, and helps manage energy levels. Prioritizing nutrient-dense foods and strategic meal timing around your shifts and workouts is essential.

Q: Should I join a gym or work out at home?

A: Both can be effective. Home workouts offer convenience and flexibility, which can be advantageous for night shift schedules. Gyms can provide a wider range of equipment and a dedicated workout environment. Choose what best suits your lifestyle and preferences.

Q: What are some common mistakes night shift workers make with their workout plans?

A: Common mistakes include not scheduling workouts, attempting overly intense exercise when fatigued, inconsistent nutrition, and not listening to their body's signals for rest. Flexibility and self-awareness are key to avoiding these pitfalls.

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Negative mindset Go ahead, imagine how you'll feel when you finally accomplish your fitness goal and get a six pack abs. Just imagine you have an aesthetic physique that everyone can admire of. And just think of what your Friends, family and colleagues will say once they see you hitting gym with extreme passion level. Stay Fit in Night shift is exactly what you need to achieve your fitness goal. It can be Weight loss or Muscle gain. In fact, it's the easiest way I know to get a cover-model physique - and that says a lot, because I've tried almost every method out there. Here's a sneak peek at what you get: Muscle confusion program consists of Negative reps, High reps & Supersets Surefire Blueprint workout plan for 90 days Training plan included with 350+ exercises Know your calorie intake value based on your fitness goal NLP Technique to kick-start your day Finally, this book makes you a master in preparing your own XMC workout plan after completion of 90 days to maintain your physique for long term.

workout plan for night shift workers: *The Night Shift* Sophia Curie, 2025-01-04 'The Night Shift' offers a compelling exploration of the vital but often overlooked 20% of the global workforce who keep our world running while others sleep. Through a blend of scientific research and personal narratives, the book illuminates the complex interplay between human biology, economic necessity, and social dynamics that shape the lives of night shift workers. It meticulously examines how these workers adapt to operating against their natural circadian rhythms while maintaining essential services across healthcare, transportation, and financial sectors. The book's three-part structure takes readers on a journey from intimate personal experiences to broader systemic implications. Drawing from chronobiology and occupational health studies, it reveals fascinating insights about how the human body adapts to nocturnal schedules and the unique culture that emerges among night workers. The research presents striking findings about the physiological challenges these workers face, while also highlighting the economic imperatives that make 24-hour operations indispensable in our modern, globalized world. What sets this work apart is its comprehensive approach to addressing both challenges and solutions, combining quantitative data with qualitative insights from workers across diverse industries. The book serves as both a scholarly analysis and practical guide, offering evidence-based strategies for managing sleep patterns and implementing supportive workplace policies. It appeals to a broad audience, from policy makers and business leaders to current or prospective night shift workers, providing valuable insights into this parallel world of productivity that exists after sunset.

workout plan for night shift workers: The Weekend Warrior Workout Plan Michelle Grain, The Weekend Warrior Workout Plan is the ultimate fitness guide for busy people who want results—without giving up their weekday sanity. Whether you're a time-strapped professional, a parent juggling chaos, or simply someone who refuses to live in the gym, this book delivers a powerful, practical program built around your real life. In just a few focused sessions each weekend, you'll build strength, burn fat, and boost energy—no endless hours or complicated routines required. With smart, efficient workouts, expert advice, and motivational tips, this is your blueprint for turning Saturdays and Sundays into your secret fitness weapon. No more excuses. No more burnout. Just a stronger, healthier you—one weekend at a time.

workout plan for night shift workers: The Breast Cancer Survivor's Fitness Plan Carolyn M. Kaelin, Francesca Coltrera, Josie Gardiner, Joy Prouty, 2007-04-10 The only breast cancer recovery program designed by a Harvard doctor and survivor and approved by the American Council on Exercise (ACE) Feel healthy again. Regain control of your life. Exciting new research reveals that regular exercise can reduce the chance of breast cancer recurrence and extend your life. Exercise can also help you recover energy, strength, and flexibility diminished by lifesaving breast cancer treatments. Dr. Carolyn Kaelin is a leading breast cancer surgeon who understands the important links among exercise, recovery, and the quality of life--and she is a breast cancer survivor, too. Designed with master trainers Josie Gardner and Joy Prouty, The Breast Cancer Survivor's Fitness Plan features effective, inspiring workouts tailored for each type of surgery and adapted for differing fitness levels. Feel strong again and Improve your flexibility and balance Rebuild your muscles Protect your bones Enhance your appearance, vitality, and all-around health For more information

on Dr. Kaelin about breast cancer treatment and recovery, read her award-winning book *Living Through Breast Cancer*.

workout plan for night shift workers: *The Belly Melt Diet* Editors of Prevention, 2013-08-13 Most women spend their entire lives fighting their bodies in an effort to lose weight. The latest research reveals that you need to work with your body to get the best results: There are actually right and wrong times to eat, exercise, and sleep—and what works for one woman may not work for the next. The Belly Melt Diet teaches women to tune into their own rhythms—not just their sleep/wake cycles, but also the cycles of their hunger hormones. Readers will also learn their best time to exercise, and how to tame the ups and downs of the menstrual cycle to maximize belly fat-burning, overall metabolism boosting, and the soaring energy and confidence that come with feeling balanced and achieving fitness goals. The simple 2-phase diet plan teaches women how to eat, exercise, and sleep at their best, with over 100 easy, delicious, fat-burning recipes, the Perfect Timing Workouts, and the newest research in chronobiology, the study of body rhythms. Real women who tried the Belly Melt Diet lost up to 19 pounds in just 5 weeks and embarked on a slimming, energizing, revitalizing lifestyle that will stay with them for good.

workout plan for night shift workers: *FASTING GENIUS* Air Page, 2023-08-04 Discover the path to effortless weight loss with *Fasting Genius* by Air Page, health guru and founder of the world-renowned 'New Leaf Wellness Resort' in Koh Samui, Thailand. Since 2008, Air has guided over 10,000 individuals to attain peak health, and now, she's ready to share her secrets with you from the kitchen of New Leaf Wellness Resort. *Fasting Genius* isn't merely a diet book - it's a lifestyle shift and a call to rediscover the power of mindful eating. Learn how intermittent fasting can revolutionize your health, demystify calories, and enable a rapid yet safe weight loss journey that you can sustain. Navigate the labyrinth of health and wellness with clarity and ease, transforming your life one fast at a time. Beyond the weight loss wisdom, *Fasting Genius* is also a treasure trove of culinary inspiration. With over 90 delectable recipes designed to satiate and nourish, you'll never feel deprived. From mouth-watering main meals to delicious snacks, including over 30 vegetarian options, Air's recipes are a testament to the fact that healthy eating can be delicious. Air's 28-Day Intermittent Fasting Challenge plan is at the heart of the book - a practical, step-by-step guide that will make weight loss seamless and natural. By understanding the distinction between hunger and craving, you'll foster mindful eating habits that will liberate you from the endless cycle of dieting. Also woven into the pages of *Fasting Genius* is Air's inspiring journey - from founding New Leaf Wellness Resort to becoming a beacon of hope for people struggling with weight and eating habits. This personal narrative adds depth to the book, making it captivating. *Fasting Genius* is more than just a book. It's an invitation to master the art of fasting and reprogram your relationship with food. Once you grasp this, weight loss becomes easy - no more struggles or yoyo dieting. Just pure, life-enhancing wellness. So why wait? Unleash your inner 'Fasting Genius' and embrace the revolution today.

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workout plan for night shift workers: Is Your Job Making You Fat? Ken Lloyd, Stacey Laura Lloyd, 2016-02-02 The only thing that should be fat on your job is your paycheck. There is a “huge” worldwide obesity problem. While fads and quick-fix diets abound, they fail to address an important question in weight gain today: is your job making you fat? The answer is “Yes.” This bold assertion is based on a great deal of global research that continues to confirm a compelling relationship between working and weight gain. The powerful link between the workplace and the waistline is due to numerous factors, including the sedentary nature of today's jobs, the onslaught of unhealthy foods that are constantly foisted upon employees, higher levels of job stress, longer and more demanding work hours, peer pressure, new and unconventional jobs, and even more. Put it all together and you have the perfect storm for weight gain. *Is Your Job Making You Fat?* not only identifies and analyzes all of the central sources of weight gain associated with work, but also provides highly effective steps to control this ever-expanding problem and help you lose weight. Authors Ken and Stacey Lloyd offer a new approach where you apply your businesslike mindset and skill-set to weight management. After all, at work, you have a plan that includes objectives, benchmark dates, strategies, priorities, deadlines, and measurable results. This book shows you how to use this same methodology to take charge of your weight.

workout plan for night shift workers: Mind and Muscle Sean Yaghotian, 2021-03-30 One of the remarkable accomplishments a human can ever achieve in a lifetime is to be able to connect the body and mind into one dimension. The body works best when in alliance with the mind. *Mind and Muscle* is a book that demonstrates the physical aspects of fitness and exercise, it then explores deeper into the psychological and spiritual practices of a nourishing way of life. This book is a balanced display of discovery showcased in an examination of the early development of our upbringing, as well as where we are in our current state; it then investigates what long-term changes can be made and demonstrates unique techniques that can be followed to accomplish a healthy wholesome lifestyle assisting with those targeted changes. All aspects of life are discussed to assist people with different backgrounds and unique circumstances in life. Whether you are a young adult looking to start your life and establish a family with kids, or you are in the second half of your life, post family, or you are just getting started in adulthood, this book can be beneficial. The unique approach and topics discussed in this journey go beyond the normal fitness book and can benefit and assist people with advanced level of knowledge in health and fitness, as well as people with minimal fitness background. The message in *Mind and Muscle* is that fitness and exercise go beyond just challenging the body; they must challenge and connect the mind with human inner dimensions to enable highest potentials. Fitness is a spiritual secrete, and if exercise is capable of changing your mind, body, feelings, and attitude, then it has the power to change your entire life.

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weight training plan Push your personal limits and begin building your dream physique in 90 days by learning how to properly challenge your body during weight training. The 90-Day Weight Training Plan is a customizable program that makes nutrition simple, with easy-to-understand week-by-week guides that explain carb timing, appropriate protein intake, and food choices to build lean muscle mass. Start by setting up your home gym and learning important fundamentals of weight training, as you discover the best moves to create a balanced, symmetrical physique. Then, design a complete, detailed nutrition plan, complete with training fundamentals and tips on achieving the intensity and skill you need to promote change in your body. The 90-Day Weight Training Plan includes: Professional advice—The author, Coach Julie, competed for 12 years, graduating from an amateur athlete to a professional fitness model on the way. Perfect form instruction—Informative illustrations guide you safely through each exercise. Efficient training—Discover the theory of practicing the least number of exercises for the greatest impact. Use The 90-Day Weight Training Plan to set nutritional goals, track progress, and build your perfect body.

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workout plan for night shift workers: *The Free-Time Formula* Jeff Sanders, 2018-02-16 Find the time, clarity, and mental space to achieve your goals *The Free-Time Formula* helps you slow down time and get the important things done. We're all overworked, stressed, and always being asked to do more, and do it better; the days aren't getting any longer, so something has to give—don't let it be your sanity. This book provides a real-world framework for more effective time management that helps you prioritize, focus, clarify, and go. You'll begin with a time audit to assess your current stress, strategies, and output—and the results may shock you. From there, you'll work step-by-step toward a new daily routine that will help you become the focused, efficient achiever you've been trying to be for so long. It's not about cramming more into your precious 24 hours, it's about figuring out what really matters to you, and getting the most important things done first. Every day. Never miss another big deadline, never flake on an important meeting, never be late to an appointment again. It is possible with great planning, and this book is your personal guide. Focused on action, not filler, this book is an excellent resource for those who want to achieve more, but do less. With a few simple changes, you'll find the time you've been missing and put it to more productive use. Define and prioritize your personal and professional goals and responsibilities Cut the distractions and clarify your daily objectives Adapt your workplace tools and environment to

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2015-03-03 An “invaluable” memoir by a counselor who left the elite private-school world to help poor and working-class kids get into college (Washington Monthly). Winner of the Studs and Ida Terkel Award Joshua Steckel left an elite Manhattan school to serve as the first-ever college guidance counselor at a Brooklyn public high school—and has helped hundreds of disadvantaged kids gain acceptance. But getting in is only one part of the drama. This riveting work of narrative nonfiction follows the lives of ten of Josh’s students as they navigate the vast, obstacle-ridden landscape of college in America, where students for whom the stakes of education are highest find unequal access and inadequate support. Among the students we meet are Mike, who writes his essays from a homeless shelter and is torn between his longing to get away to an idyllic campus and his fear of leaving his family in desperate circumstances; Santiago, a talented, motivated, and undocumented student, who battles bureaucracy and low expectations as he seeks a life outside the low-wage world of manual labor; and Ashley, who pursues her ambition to become a doctor with almost superhuman drive—but then forges a path that challenges received wisdom about the value of an elite liberal arts education. At a time when the idea of “college for all” is hotly debated, this book uncovers, in heartrending detail, the ways the American education system fails in its promise as a ladder to opportunity—yet provides hope in its portrayal of the intelligence, resilience, and everyday heroics of young people whose potential is too often ignored. “A profound examination of the obstacles faced by low-income students . . . and the kinds of reforms needed to make higher education and the upward mobility it promises more accessible.” —Booklist

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