



Unwind Before You Grind

Team 5 – AI For Self Improvement (RESTED)

Meet the Team



Shirley Z.

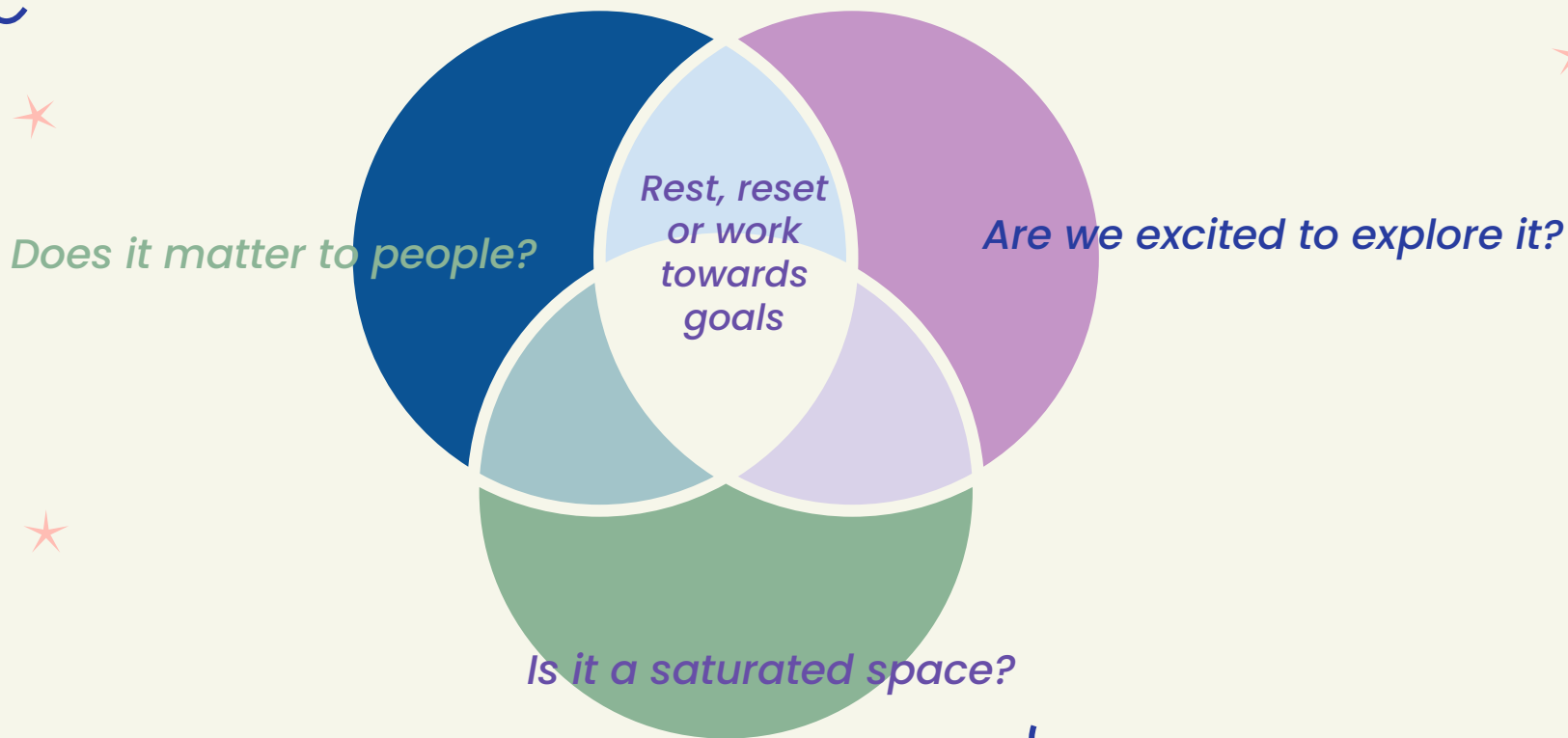


Ziyu R.



Ruba A.

Domain Selection



Selecting Participants



Friends of friends in the Bay!

(2nd degree
connections)

*All locally in the bay and we
went out to coffee-chat*



Non-Stanford Students!

(grad students and
postgrads/working)

*Audio recorded and
transcribed via Otter.ai*



Work connections!

(people in different life
stages and industries)

*All different professions,
some single, some married,
some WFH*

Interviewees

*Our extreme/non-user
who does not use AI tools
but is acquainted with
technology and
productivity tools*

01



Quinn

F, 25

WFH Campus Recruiter

02



Britney

F, 24

Software Engineer

03



Kristen

F, 22

Architecture Grad
Student

04



Jack

M, 57

Primary Care Physician

... and asked them

What's your actual default when you have 15 unexpected minutes?

What's one long-term goal you're trying to achieve right now (reading, leetcode, a big project)?

Do you want to feel productive in these moments, or do you sometimes just want to rest?



Is scrolling actually the enemy, or is it fine sometimes?

When you have a free 10-15 minutes, do you ever hesitate over which useful thing to do?

What is preventing you from completing your long term goals?



Quinn

**“I have very little
internal drive... If there
are no consequences
for not doing
something, I may
simply leave it there.”**

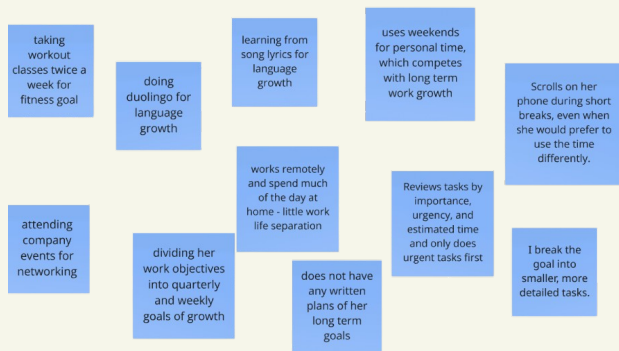
Says



Think



Do



Feel



Says

WFH Campus Recruiter wanting career change, balanced life, working out, and learning Korean, occasionally doom scrolls

trying to build a more balanced life

she is trying

she wants to change her career

wants to learn how to drive

currently exercising twice a week via classes

says she lacks the internal drive to do her tasks

she wants to learn Korean pronunciation to know song lyrics

would do dueling or dumbbell exercises with her 15 minutes

a medium *

Think

Likes structures to get things done, but want a balanced life overall

for driving, thinks that it is not a priority as she does not yet need it

thinks that the issue is on her that her goals are not balanced

A balanced life requires more than work; it includes *exercise, travel, hobbies, and social connection*

wants a system that would adapt to changing priorities instead of treating every goal as equally urgent.

A short block of time is valuable if it has a clear, concrete activity attached to it.

A balanced life requires more than work; it includes exercise, travel, hobbies, and social connection.

wants a tool that tool that help create accountability without simply nagging her like a parent

knowledge

Do

Plans things and begins them, but does not make much progress on plans that have no repercussions of not completing

taking workout classes twice a week for fitness goal

do dueling or dumbbell exercises with her 15 minutes

attending company events for networking

into quarterly and weekly goals of growth

any written plans of her long term goals

asks by since, and time y does asks first

Scrolls on her phone during short breaks, even when she would prefer to use the time differently.

I break the goal into smaller, more detailed tasks.

Feel

Feels stuck with her incomplete goals without a plan and frustrated without drive, but busy all the time

feels frustrated that she has no internal drive for long term goals that deadlines provide for short term goals

feels constrained about working from home

professionally

Wants a stronger sense of balance and freedom in daily life.

feels self doubt and feels like her intrinsic

Feels comfortable with structured commitments such as paid fitness classes.

Feels that a meaningful external push could make difficult goals actionable.

the constant need for a plan

Feels stuck when she believes the current moment is not the right time to begin

Takeaways:

insight

Motivation depends on energy, interest, and context.

External accountability can help, but generic reminders often feel like nagging.

need

Day-day options based on energy & motivation

People want personal, meaningful accountability





Kristen

**“If I have
deliberately set
aside time to rest, I
cannot learn at the
same time.”**

i am tired
of my for
you page

Says

architecture
student who spend
most of the time
studying, modeling,
and doing school
work

been knitting
alot and finds
time for it
almost
everyday

wants to
start
exercising

"When I'm not
interested, I
don't have the
motivation to
go."

"I just
scrolled"
for an hour

does work that is
driven by interest
but otherwise
does not start
other things

"Interest
comes first
and then
deadline."

"I enjoy being
in control of
my time and
what I'm
doing."

"I feel helpless
and powerless"
when school
controls her
progress.

"I would need
a guaranteed
result that
interested
me."

"I want to learn
something
because I want
to enrich
myself."

"I want to be
in charge of
my time over
a longer
period"

Think

A hobby is worth
protecting when
it creates visible
progress in a
manageable
amount of time.

Knitting works
because it is
intrinsically
interesting,
relaxing, and easy
to start.

Physical effort
feels more
acceptable when
it produces a
clear result.

Interest is
the primary
trigger for
action x2

wants a
reward for
behavior
change

Frequent short
deadlines can feel
more stressful
than one broad
deadline covering
multiple tasks.

Digital tools cannot
control her
behavior if she does
not care about the
incentive they
provide

School consumes
so much time
that personal
long-term goals
can feel
unrealistic

Progress must be
visible enough to
justify continuing
a difficult or
uninteresting
activity

Learning a new skill
is worthwhile when
it can be applied to
something
important or
interesting

multitasking
does not enable
for good
productive
learning

there has to be
some
consequence for
her to change
behavior

most goals
arent about
achievements,
but self-
improvement

Do

Knits either in
the morning
or at night
whenever she
finds time

Reduces knitting
to about thirty
minutes when
she has places to
go or people to
see.

Exercises
approximatel
y once a
week

Tries at-home
workouts but
thinks it is not as
good as going to
the gym.

starts a new
thing, but
has trouble
finishing it

Watches long-
form YouTube
while knitting,
cooking, cleaning,
or doing makeup.

Takes naps
during short
breaks or
scrolls on her
phone.

Delays homework
and resume
updates when
they are not
immediately due.

Completes useful
activities instead
of scrolling about
60% of the time.

Prioritizes tasks
based mainly on
deadlines, while
sometimes
choosing the task
that interests her
most.

Follows her
interests rather
than study-app
instructions
about what to
learn

Does not
regularly use
planners, task-
management
apps, or phone-
locking apps

does whatever
she feels at the
moment (cooking
cleaning, going
out)

Feel

satisfied when
she can see
progress in a
hobby

low-interest
and
unmotivated
toward
exercise

guilty or
dissatisfied
after doom-
scrolling

exhausted by
school work and
not motivated to
start new goals
outside

social media
is not
teaching her
anything

feels
independent
and protective
of her ability to
control herself

feels pressured
when school
determines the
pace and
direction of her
progress

feels bored or
dissatisfied with
repetitive
algorithmic
recommendations

feels that her goals
are personal
changes she wants
to make, rather
than fixed external
achievements

feels conflicted
between wanting
to enrich herself
and wanting to
rest

unwilling to start
new things that she
knows she cannot
commit to due to
too many other
commitments

feels
unmotivated
-->
unproductive

i am tired
of my for
you page

Says

architecture
student who spend
most of the time
studying, modeling,
and doing school
work

does work that is
driven by interest
but otherwise
does not start
other things

**Architecture student
who does not want to
start long term
projects feeling
overwhelmed by
school and tired of her
phone's algorithm**

to enrich
myself."

my time over
a longer
period"

"I just
scrolled"
for an hour

"I would need
a guaranteed
result that
interested
me."

Think

A hobby is worth
protecting when
it creates visible
progress in a
manageable
amount of time.

Knitting works
because it is
intrinsically
interesting,
relaxing, and easy
to start

Physical effort
feels more

Interest is
the primary
trigger for
action

wants a
reward for
behavior
change

Frequent short
deadlines can feel
more stressful
than one broad
deadline covering
multiple tasks.

Learning a new skill
is worthwhile when
it can be applied to
something
important or
interesting

**Wants to do things
only when
intrinsically driven,
needs long term
motivation but
also incremental
successes**

does not enable
for good
productive
learning

some
consequence for
her to change
behavior

Progress must be
visible enough to
justify continuing
a difficult or
uninteresting
activity

most goals
arent about
achievements,
but self-
improvement

Do

Knits either in
the morning
or at night
whenever she
finds time

Reduced to
at least
minutes, she
hugs or
goes on

Takes naps
during short
breaks or
scrolls on her
phone.

Delays home
and resu
updates v
they are
immediate

**Keeps just one
hobby and does not
want to start new
ones knowing she
cannot commit,
naps and scrolls but
does not like the
mindlessness**

management
apps, or phone-
locking apps

moment (cooking
cleaning, going
out)

starts a new
thing, but
has trouble
finishing it

Watches long-
form YouTube
while knitting,
cooking, cleaning,
or doing makeup.

Follows her
interests rather
than study-app
instructions
about what to
learn

Feel

satisfied when
she can see
progress in a
hobby

feels
independent
and protective
of her ability to
control herself

feels conflicted
between wanting
to enrich herself
and wanting to
rest

unwilling to start
new things that she
knows she cannot
commit to due to
too many other
commitments

exhausted by
school work and
motivated to
new goals
outside

feels that her goals
are personal
changes she wants
to make, rather
than fixed external
achievements

feels
unmotivated
-->
unproductive

social media
is not
teaching her
anything

Takeaways:

insight

Rest and learning are different mental modes.

Long term goals are often driven by intrinsic motivation only.

need

People need permission to rest

People need motivating feedback

★ Surprise:

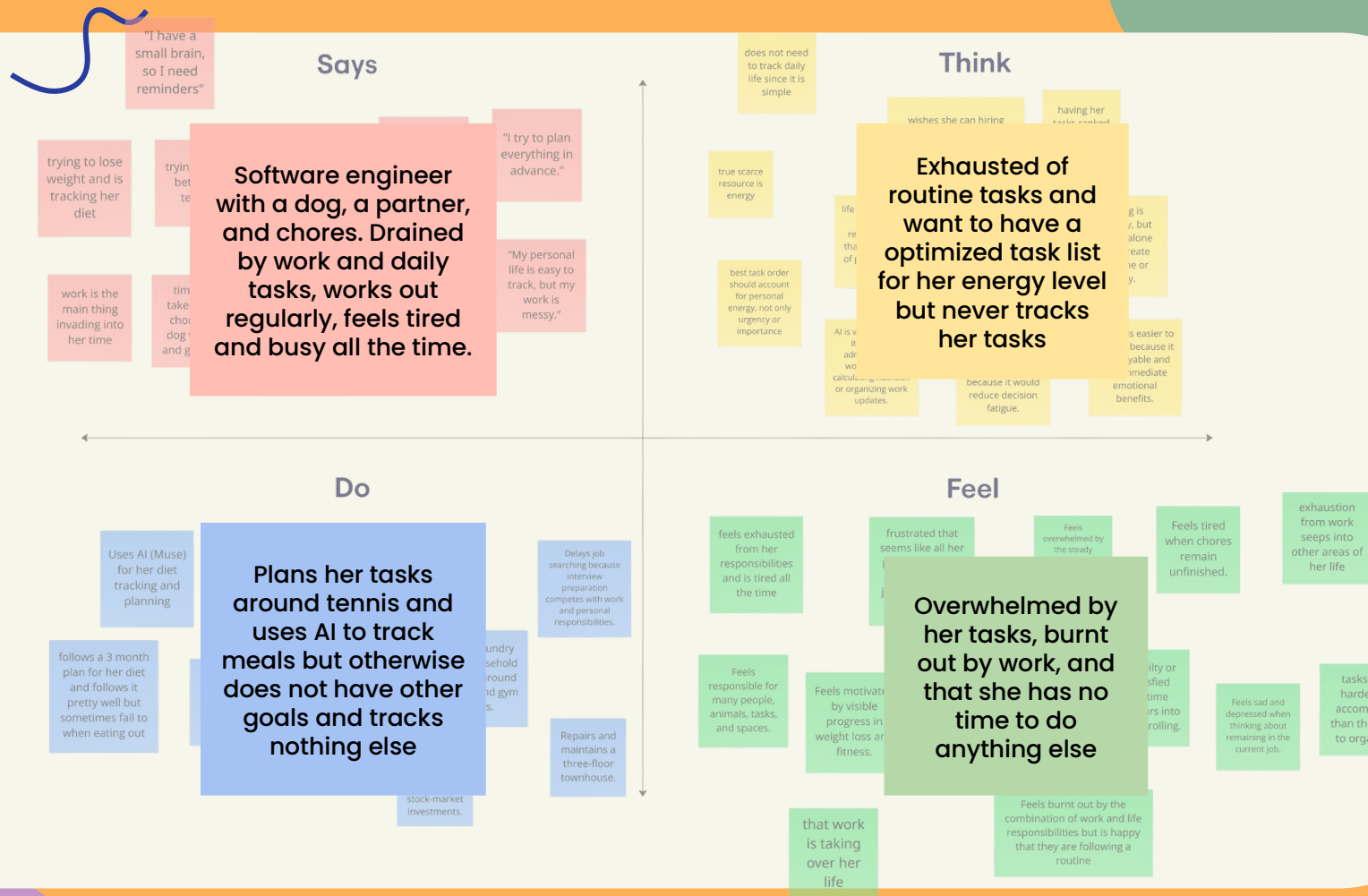
Sometimes the cognitive burden can make people not want to have goals in the first place.



Britney

“Things are not always completed. I would love to clean my table, but I haven’t found the time, and I don’t have the energy.”





Takeaways:

insight

People do not experience time as neutral.

The goals that matter most can be the hardest to begin

need

choosing between rest and progress based on current capacity.

a low-effort way to maintain momentum on long-term goals





Jack

“My mental fatigue is so much that it’s hard for me to focus on the technical aspects.”

Says

As far as life balance goes, I'm not where I want to be.

I'm working way too much.

During lunch, a lot of times when I do pick up social media, the intention is just to kind of not have to think and just kind of let things settle down before I jump into the next wave, which is the next set of patients and tasks.

I will try and bring a sketchbook with me, so that if I'm waiting for somebody, or I'm, you know, waiting for something to happen, I can always just sketch loosely ... whatever environment that I'm in

I probably play chess every day, and I usually play a couple of three minute games, and then I do chess puzzles.

Working all day, I don't have the ... bandwidth nor the desire to do that. So right now what I'm doing is I'm organically getting better by just doing chess puzzles.

Sometimes I do gain inspiration from it in terms of art or these little art lessons ... But ... sometimes that's few and far between.

It's a very slow way of developing, but it's also much more relaxed than doing lessons.

There are times when I've been on social media. It's like, oh my god, it's been an hour, and I just wasted a whole hour.

I've got a vision of what I want to create, but I don't have the skills to do it.

My mental fatigue is so much that it's hard to focus on the technical aspects

It's the process that I enjoy as well. It's not just the end result... VS I'm starting to see a little bit of improvement, and that's gratifying.

I've got 15 minutes during lunch. Learning, you know, five or six vocabulary words is ... too much.

Lunchtime might be that time where I feel like I want to be doing something, but I'm not sure what to do. So there are definitely these times.

Think

A lunch break should help him prepare for the next round of patients and tasks. His stated intention is to let his mind settle before returning to work.

Casual practice is a worthwhile route to gradual improvement. Chess puzzles let him develop strategies and pattern recognition without the demands of formal lessons.

relationships are grounding/touch points for his day

Art is both a personal learning practice and a possible retirement identity.

Having a few free minutes doesn't guarantee the mental capacity to learn. Even a small vocabulary exercise can feel like too much during lunch.

Social media provides occasional value, but often feels unmeaning. Art inspiration and small lessons are exceptions to its generally low assessment of its value.

"cognitive rest" is important!

An effective break may need to be mindless, but mindlessness can become wasteful if it continues too long.

Rest can be valuable even without a tangible achievement. In discussing evening television, he recognizes a benefit in temporarily disengaging after a day of conversation and work.

His current approach to free time may change when work becomes less demanding. He expects to pursue formal classes when he retires.

does not think duolingo is the best way to learn a language

Do

Browses news and Instagram during lunch when a meeting does not occupy that time. He describes having approximately half an hour to eat.

Views content connected to existing interests, including art, art history, paintings, anime, chess, news, and politics.

Tries to bring a sketchbook when he may have to wait, allowing him to sketch the surrounding environment

Previously listened to relaxing music while looking through nature images

Completed a watercolor in about 15-20 minutes and gave it to his father.

Plays a couple of short chess games at lunch, describing games lasting three minutes.

Does chess puzzles or plays a game while waiting for a meeting to begin, giving an example of a five-minute wait.

Chooses loose, gestural drawing when tired during the week, while sometimes taking more formal online art classes on weekends.

Previously used casual gaming apps such as Candy Crush during downtime

Reports occasions when social media use lasts an hour and feels wasted afterward.

Sometimes does chess puzzles during meeting segments that do not apply to him.

walks for about 2 to 3 miles a day

Previously used Duolingo and another language program before traveling to Japan.

Goes to the gym at least once a week, using the gym at his office.

Feel

Mentally fatigued after work, making technical learning difficult to focus on.

Strained by the prospect of goal-driven learning during lunch, particularly when he must return immediately to clinical work.

More relaxed doing chess puzzles than formal chess lessons, while still appreciating gradual improvement.

Curious about what comes next while scrolling

Uneasy about social media's pull, describing an attraction he can feel but to unsure is healthy.

Occasionally uncertain about how to spend lunch downtime, despite wanting something to do.

Gratified by small signs of artistic improvement, especially when his skills begin to approach what he imagines creating.

Self-critical about his art, and finds it difficult to quiet that criticism.

taking chess lessons was too cognitively challenging

Pleased when a brief creative activity produces something he likes, as with the watercolor he made for his father

Ambivalent about passive downtime, recognizing the value of cognitive rest while questioning the value of some time spent watching television or scrolling.

turns to "brainrot" when they don't want to think

Says

As far as life balance goes, I'm not where I want to be.

I'm working way too much.

During lunch, a lot of times when I do pick up social media, the intention is just to kind of not have to think and just kind of let things settle down before I jump into the next wave, which is the next set of patients and tasks.

I will try and bribe sketchbook with that if I'm waiting somebody, or I'm know, waiting something to happen can always just sit loosely... what environment that

Primary care physician whose work dominates his schedule. Wants to stay healthy, do art, play chess, and connect w family.

I probably play

It's a very slow way of developing, but

I've got 15 minutes during lunch. Learning, you know, five or six words is so much.

Lunchtime might be that time where I feel like I want to be doing something, but I'm not sure what to do. So there are definitely these times.

My mental fatigue is so much that it's hard to focus on the technical aspects

It's the process that I enjoy as well. It's not just the end result... it's the starting to see a little bit of improvement, and that's gratifying.

Think

A lunch break should help him prepare for the next round of patients and tasks. His stated intention is to let his mind settle before returning to work.

Casual practice is a worthwhile gradual thing. Chess puzzles develop strategy without the formal structure of a lesson.

Having a few free minutes doesn't guarantee the mental capacity to learn. Even a small vocabulary exercise can feel like too much during lunch.

Rest can be valuable even without a tangible achievement. In discussing evening television, he recognizes a benefit in temporarily disengaging after a day of conversation and work.

Social interactions feel an improvement to his isolation.

His current frustration when work demands purpose formal classes when he retires.

Wants to balance work, health, relationships, creativity, and rest. Wants slower paced practice of goals as he heads toward retirement

to learn a language

Art is both a personal learning and a

break to be out can be useful if too

Do

Browses news and Instagram during lunch when a meeting does not occupy that time. He describes having approximately half an hour to eat.

Views content connected to existing interests, including art, art history, paintings, anime, chess, news, and politics.

Plays a couple of short chess games at lunch, describing games lasting three minutes.

Does chess or plays a game while waiting meeting to give an example of a five-minute wait.

Sometimes does chess puzzles during meeting segments that do not apply to him.

walks for about 2 to 3 miles a day

Previously used Duolingo and another language program before traveling to Japan.

Exercises, plays chess puzzles, reads news and social media during lunch, spends intentional time with his spouse, and plans to reduce his workload before retirement

Tries to bring a

Previously

Completed a watercolor in about 15-20 minutes and showed it to his spouse.

Reports occasions when social media use starts an hour and feels wasted afterward.

gym at least once a week, using the gym at his office.

Feel

Mentally fatigued after work, making technical learning difficult to focus on.

Strained by the prospect of goal-driven learning during lunch, particularly when he must return immediately to clinical work.

More cheerful, less anxious in

Curious what next screen

Tired of work but restored by visible progress of his long term goals. Feels conflicted about using social media and television as a way to rest.

Gratified by small signs of artistic

Pleased when a brief creative activity produces something he likes, as with the watercolor he made for his father

Ambivalent about passive downtime, recognizing the value of cognitive rest while questioning the value of some time spent watching television or scrolling.

turns to "brainrot" when they don't want to think

cognitively challenging

Takeaways:

insight

People might have available time but lack the cognitive energy for progress toward a long-term goal.

Activities are more sustainable when they are enjoyable in the moment

need

choosing activities that match their energy

A more enjoyable journey towards a goal



Key Takeaways

1. Time is not the only constraint

energy, focus, or motivation matter.

2. Rest can be productive

A short break shouldn't always be an opportunity to accomplish more.

3. Motivation is personal

Interest, deadlines, and money for example

4. Planning does not guarantee action

Plans are easy, execution is hard.

5. Goals change with life

Work, relationships, and health reshape priorities.

Reflection

What Surprised Us

- Assumed people wanted more productive breaks.
- Found goals are rarely written down.
- The core burden is deciding what matters and allowing rest.

How We Adapted

- Shifted focus beyond short break habits.
- Explored what gives a goal value and what prevents action.
- Examined how energy, deadlines, and health impact progress.

Key Learning

Core Insight

Initial focus was optimizing free-time productivity.

Deeper Need:

Helping people manage the mental & emotional burden of long-term goals.

What's Next

Narrowing

Focusing on a specific context

Target User

Interviewing "overplanners"

Key Goals

Understanding when planning reduces burden vs overloads

A2 Direction

Compare planning styles, then identify a specific, actionable need.

