I DON'T HAVE TIME
15-MINUTE WAYS TO SHAPE A LIFE YOU LOVE

EMMA GREY & AUDREY THOMAS
‘This book spoke to me from the very first page. Finally, a time-management book for real people by real people. It was interesting and engaging with stories and anecdotes that made me laugh, cry and nod my head in agreement. If you only read one self-help book this year, make it this one.’

Alison Abernethy

‘THE “MY 15 MINUTES” PROGRAM HAS RE-AWOKEN MY PASSION FOR LIFE. I DIDN’T EVEN REALIZE THAT I HAD LOST IT AMID THE DAILY GRIND, BUT NOW I HAVE SO MUCH MORE ENTHUSIASM AND ENERGY.’

Beth Cavallari

‘Thanks so much! Some simple things that we forget, and the reminder that we need. And fantastic ideas we’d never think of. Loved the program!’

L.K.

‘This book has it all — laughs and tears, advice and support and, most of all, the encouragement most of us need to just get started! Learning how to make the most of the smallest chunks of time has made a huge difference in what I achieve. Thanks for the inspiration!’

Alison Bailey

‘I knew I would like this program from the moment I read the description! The biggest thing I have taken away is that now if a task seems insurmountable, I think “I’ll just spend 15 minutes on it”. It’s a mindset that can help everyone.’

Anne George

‘THIS PROGRAM IS AMAZING AT REMINDING YOU HOW MUCH IS POSSIBLE AND IT ONLY TAKES 15 MINUTES AT A TIME. IT RE-ENERGIZED AND RE-IGNITED ME AS AN INDIVIDUAL, SETTING ME ON A NEW PATH OF SELF-DISCOVERY AND SELF-WORTH WHICH BENEFITS EVERY ASPECT OF MY LIFE.’

J.L.

‘The storytelling style of this book made it unique in the genre for me. There are few traditional time-management books that provoke regular tears and “ah ha” moments the way this one did! Thoroughly recommended.’

Sarah Turner

‘I am completely impressed with Emma and Audrey’s professional and personal style of supportive coaching. They have profoundly changed my life, my outlook, my beliefs about myself. I am a stronger, more confident person at home, work and in my relationships with others. I feel this and others close to me have noticed, too.’

Fiona McIntosh

‘LOVED THIS BOOK! A PAGE TURNER FROM START TO FINISH WITH AUDREY AND EMMA’S ENGAGING STYLE OF WRITING CONVEYING THEIR RELATABLE STORIES.’

Michele Farrell
EMMA GREY is a work-life specialist who uses a suite of innovative concepts and tools to provide organizations and individuals with practical solutions to the modern challenge of ‘having it all’. Emma runs seminars, workshops and executive coaching, writes regularly for national media, and together with Audrey, is co-founder of the highly successful ‘My 15 Minutes’ program (www.my15minutes.com.au).

AUDREY THOMAS is an experienced coach and facilitator with a background in project and change management, learning and development, and operations management. After a corporate career spanning the UK, Europe and North America, she now specializes in working with individual clients and teams to discover and develop their untapped potential and improve effectiveness.

TO OUR PARENTS
FOR GIVING US ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD

AND TO JEFF
FOR THE PRECIOUS TIMES
I NEED MORE TIME!

BY ABIGAIL TURNER, AGED NINE

My name is Abigail and I am in 4P.
My topic is ‘I Need More Time’ and you may be wondering, for what?
Well, to do my homework, eat chocolate, ride a horse, go shopping.
I think we should have 48 hours in a day and 24 hours for a night.
But the downside would be longer school hours, longer homework, longer time your parents have to nag you. It would take a longer time to eat your breakfast and you would get to school late every day ...

Then you would get shouted at by the teacher because the teacher doesn’t like you being late. More time in the world would mean more time sitting in the dentist’s chair and I already sit in there too long as it is! And what if more time meant having to wait longer for your cake to bake in the oven? Oh no! That would be a disaster!

But, on the upside, if we had twice as much time each day and night, you would have more time to see your friends and travel to meet people in other countries. And another really good thing if we had more time is there would probably, and hopefully, be fewer wars in the world because people would have more time to get to know each other, and understand each other. Then maybe we wouldn’t have wars because there wouldn’t be anything to fight about.

And what about me?
Personally, if I had more time, I would do all the things I love most in the world:

→ Go on the computer
→ Go trail riding every day after school with my favourite horse Sooty
→ Drink my favourite cookies-and-cream milkshake at Oliver Brown
→ Go to Fiji on a holiday
→ Watch How to Train Your Dragon all day
→ Play netball
→ Climb every tree and wall I can find
→ Go shopping for toys and books, especially books, and lots of toys too
→ Make models with my dad
→ Play ninjas with my sister in the backyard; and
→ Go for walks with my mum, without my sister!

What’s that you say? I’m out of time? Oh dear, I need more time!
INTRODUCTION

WHY SUCH A RUSH?

Emma:

I tried not to think about the ravenous parking meter as I perched for six hours on an unforgiving plastic seat in the arrivals hall at Canberra airport. My then fourteen-year-old, Sophie, and her best friend were hoping to catch a glimpse of American YouTuber Colleen Ballinger. Colleen’s alter ego, the hapless ‘Miranda Sings’, has a cult following so fanatical her madcap spoof on self-help books was propelled to the top of the New York Times bestseller list a mere 24 hours after its pre-launch. Perhaps I was quietly fangirling about that too...

We knew Colleen had performed at the Melbourne Comedy Festival the evening before. We knew she was scheduled to perform in Canberra that night. The missing detail was which flight she’d be on, which is why we’d found ourselves at a virtually empty airport just after dawn.

The girls were resplendent in Miranda’s trademark costume: a men’s striped shirt tucked into red track pants
with ‘Haters back off’ emblazoned on the rear, clashing pink Crocs and too much red lipstick. I was dressed normally and held onto the first of several strong cappuccinos, hoping that this wouldn’t be a wild goose chase. Quietly lurking in a security-rich environment for hours with the teens decked out as identical nerds, clutching glittery posters, was bound to attract attention. The girls were stared at, photographed by tourists and even approached by the police at one point.

‘Who are you waiting for?’
‘Miranda Sings.’
‘Who?’
‘Exactly.’

Eventually, in the early afternoon we reached a point where we just wanted to go home. At least I did. It was reminiscent of the transition stage of labour. I honestly couldn’t do this any longer. I wanted an epidural.

Turning to Facebook, I hoped to be galvanized by messages of support from my friends. What I received instead was more along the lines of: ‘Five hours? Are you crazy? Who has time to waste doing this on a Sunday? Don’t you have better things to do?’

I did have other things. But were they better?

Somewhere in the sixth hour we turned our bloodshot eyes towards the arrivals gate for the umpteenth time. Were we hallucinating? Or was that her (wearing a normal amount of lipstick and normal clothes)? As the escalator conveyed the online superstar towards us, along with her then-fiancé (also a famous YouTuber) I sent a silent prayer to the Gods of Social Media and Celebrity Chasing: Please take a second to stop and say hello!

The automatic glass doors parted. She glanced up from her phone, saw the girls, broke into a smile and went straight into their arms with the type of hug usually reserved for long-lost friends. Then she introduced us to her sister (another YouTuber), posed for photos and promised to follow them both on Instagram. When you’re fourteen, and you’ve been waiting six and a half hours to meet your online idol, an Instagram follow is your life.

But this story isn’t about any of that. Not really.

Fast-forward a few weeks, and the same two girls were upset when I collected them from school. A friend’s mum had developed worrying symptoms of memory loss and confusion. She hadn’t recognized her own child. The likely diagnosis was early-onset dementia. In her forties. My age.

That was the moment for me. I thought back to the hours we’d invested in our loopy airport adventure and knew with unwavering certainty that I wanted to spend more time hanging around arrivals lounges with teenage fangirls. Not less.

Everything changed the day she figured out there was exactly enough time for the important things in her life.

Brian Andreas

HERE IS OUR PROBLEM, IS IT NOT?

We live in a time and culture where exhaustion is a status symbol. If you’re not frantic or flat out — if you don’t have too much to do and not nearly enough time in which to do it — eyebrows are raised.

‘How have you been?’ someone asks.

‘Busy!’ you chirp, because it’s the only answer you’ve ever learned to the question. ‘How was your weekend?’

‘Need a holiday just to get over it!’
‘Gah!’
‘Insane!’
‘Crazy!’
‘Ludicrous!’
‘Actually, everything’s cruising along quite calmly,’ nobody interjects, ever. ‘Work’s under control. The house is organized. Had a date with my partner on the weekend, and devoured two novels …’

Eh?
Crazy schedules!
Ships passing in the night!
Me-time? Ha.

That’s the game! None of this freewheeling about lackadaisical weekends and under-control workloads and free time and romance! This isn’t a gap year.

Women of a certain age and stage have decided we’re officially swamped, as a species. One does not simply swim. One splashes dramatically in a sea of largely self-inflicted over-commitment, despite people throwing lifebuoys and yelling that you can actually touch the bottom if you just stop struggling and stand up.

**HURRY SICKNESS**

Author James Gleick refers to what he calls ‘hurry sickness’ — that feeling of being trapped as we lament the hectic jobs (which we applied for) and drive the kids to a barrage of after-school activities (which we signed them up to) that we squeeze around second degrees and diplomas (which we enrolled in) as if the whole shebang is not a circus of our own making. Even when we do have breathing space, the story we tell tends to be one of being time-poor, stretched and tired. Because that’s the story that is valued in our society. It’s the story over which so many of us bond — sometimes for hours, while we soak the sponge of our precious time in circular conversations about how there’s never enough time …

Lean in. Lean out. Push. Pull. Sprint. Collapse. The awkward choreography of modern life jars against the rhythms in our health, relationships and careers. We crank up the sound until it grates and we can’t hear the music any more. We keep spinning across the stage, even when our bodies ache and our minds churn. We dance, not because nobody’s watching but because we’re worried that everyone is.

And right there, in the midst of too-full lives, jam-packed with ‘shoulds’ and ‘musts’ and ‘I wish I hads’, there are our Miranda Sings moments. There’s the colour that’s been dimmed or missing from our lives. There are the things we really want to do, and we want to do them now, regardless of what else is happening and what people think. There’s a state of peace achievable not just during rare breaks away from our normal lives but in the midst of them. And there are the cherished dreams we’ve swept under the carpet for ‘one day’ when things are easier and less hectic, and there are fewer people clinging to us.
HOW DO PEOPLE DO IT?

So, I say raise your expectations. Elongate your process. Lie on your deathbed with a to-do list a mile long and smile at the infinite opportunity granted to you. Create ridiculous standards for yourself and then savor the inevitable failure. Learn from it. Live it. Let the ground crack and rocks crumble around you because that's how something amazing grows, through the cracks ...

Mark Manson

There's no special secret to chasing your dreams, and no secret 'productivity sauce'. People who've shaped lives they love haven't hacked the system or found a magic door into a parallel world with twice as much time, where everything always comes up roses.

The sparkly world of social media tricks us into thinking there's a genetically modified breed of Deliriously Happy People who've somehow slipped through the reality net and appear to be leading super-sized lives. Always smiling. Always winning. Always hitting goals amidst a flawless regime of self-care and posting motivational quotes to prove it. #nofilter #blessed

We're not talking about the tiny percentage of people whose airbrushed perfection asserts itself from the pages of glossy magazines. It's not the people basking on yachts in designer bikinis, sipping Verve Clicquot from Waterford crystal flutes, that are really the challenge for us here.

It's the woman next door. The one with the up-to-date curriculum vitae and tidy car, whose kids seem biologically programmed to manage more than one spoonful of breakfast cereal without a choreographed fanfare from a marching band. Or it's the woman above you in your Facebook news feed, the one with the partner or babies or career or family life or holidays or home or financial security or hobbies you crave. Or the one with all of that, tied in a bow.

It's tempting to gaze longingly at the lives of others, wishing we knew their secrets. Tempting, and dangerous. Because, if your neighbour doesn't have a breakfast-cereal problem, she'll almost certainly have a problem in the bedroom. Or the boardroom. Or the fitting room. There will be some 'room' in her house — some window of her seemingly Class A life that is shielded from public view — from which she gazes longingly at the life of the woman next door, or the one below her in the news feed ... wishing she knew your secret.

Lives we love aren't sculpted by stomping darkly through our minds in steel-capped Doc Martens, kicking ourselves each time we don't measure up. They're shaped when we tread lightly through our mess, treating chinks and fractures with a homemade balm of humour-scented self-compassion.
We have to stop worrying what other people think and get clear on what we think. Clear on what matters most — to us. From there, it’s a simple matter of just getting on with it. Right?

Well, it might be simple, were it not for the relentless chatter in our minds, telling us we don’t have time, we’re not ready, we can’t be bothered, it’s too late, it won’t work or we’d rather be doing something else.

‘Adulting!’ Who knew it would be this tricky?

CONFESSION ...

It’s the third day of January, and we’re three days into the serious resolution we made to chip away at a little part of this book each day from now until we’re contractually obliged to deliver it to our publisher in six months’ time. Which means we have six months (minus three days) to squeeze 50,000 words around all the other things: our jobs, families and any unforeseen challenges that may crop up in our lives.

It seems doable if we tackle it methodically. Thus far, though, hmmm ...

On Day One, we opened a new Word document, typed the heading and changed the font to Helvetica. On Day Two, we had good intentions, but spent the afternoon on Netflix watching a documentary about the Backstreet Boys and redecorating a child’s bedroom respectively. No matter! We thought we’d get around to book-writing in the evening. But didn’t.

It’s now Day Three, and the first day we’ve actually sat down and done what we committed to do — which was simply to ‘get on with any bit of it’. No excuses.

What stopped us until now (and we’re not just talking about those three days, but the previous three months since we signed the contract) was a serious case of ‘overwhelm’. After all, there are days when we struggle to churn out a 600-word blog post. A whole book seems a hefty thing.

It’s like any long-term goal: substantial weight loss, a long course of study, spring-cleaning the house — at the beginning it has the look and feel of Everest. And we’ve had the look and feel of people who’ve made it as far as Base Camp and now have a lovely publishing contract to show for our efforts, plus a blank Word document with nice Helvetica headings that we’re seriously considering swapping to Verdana because it’s super-important to invest several days getting the formatting just so.

It hasn’t helped that Emma is co-writing a musical based on her teen novel with a composer friend from school. Staying up late swapping lyrics and song ideas is fun. Writing the musical based on an existing book seems easier than starting this new one, so there’s a war raging: ‘Must do the harder project. Might throw together a few lyrics first.’ Hours pass. A song is written, and another day goes by with massive progress in the area with no deadline or contract and nobody to let down if it doesn’t get done. ‘We can’t leave this till the last minute’ we say to each other. ‘We can’t pull an all-nighter to produce a 50,000-word manuscript.’

Getting the contract for this book was the single most exhilarating career development for us both last year. It meant the publisher had faith in our ability to offer something fresh in the field of productivity and self-improvement. It gives us an opportunity to share the stories we love, and expertize and ideas that it’s taken us years of work and study to build. One of the reasons the publisher placed that trust in us is because we’re hired by some of the world’s top companies to lead people to thrive professionally and personally. Our online programs have attracted thousands of busy people seeking help to manage their lives.

Another reason we were asked to write a book is because we tell it like it is. At a work-life presentation for a ‘big four’ accounting firm a few years ago, an audience member came up afterwards and said, ‘I nearly didn’t come. I thought you’d be these impossibly together, stick-thin figures preaching about your seven-step system to get this stuff right … and it was refreshing to see you’re not like that at all!’

Oka-ay!

Just quietly, there are days when we feel like the Jennifer Saunders and Joanna Lumley of the time-management field. While others are doing the ‘top ten things that all successful people do before