Tim Ferriss says he's discovered the secret to working: do it as little as possible. But that doesn't mean he's living on a shoestring budget. In fact, Ferriss is earning nearly half a million dollars a year by working only 4-hours a week. That leaves him plenty of time to pursue his real passions: everything from racing motorcycles in Europe to dancing in tango competitions in Argentina.

So, by now, you must already be asking, "Who is this Tim Ferriss anyway, and why should I take him seriously?" Admittedly, Ferriss is a hard guy to describe. On one hand, he's an ambitious, successful entrepreneur who speaks six languages. On the other, he's a lay-about who lives for the surf and sand. He's shown remarkable commitment by becoming a national champion in kickboxing, and a record-holder in the tango. But don't ask him to keep a steady job. In short, Ferriss is an enigma: different than most of us, with a fabulous story to tell.

Until recently, Ferriss was yet another example of the classic overworked and underpaid American cubicle dweller. Today, he is a living example of a remarkable new life/work philosophy. With almost no effort at all, Ferriss went from a $40,000 per year salary and an 80-hour workweek, to earning over $40,000 per month with just four hours of work per week! In a step-by-step way, *The 4-Hour Workweek* reveals how he applied four basic principles of "luxury lifestyle design" to live like a millionaire, without actually having to be one. This is what Ferriss calls the "New Rich," having complete freedom of time and place.

*The 4-Hour Workweek* is so packed with information that it's basically two books in one. The first section teaches us how to strip down our work hours to the absolute bare minimum, while increasing our income at the same time. It's aimed at entrepreneurs and wage earners alike, but some of the steps may not be as readily implementable by the latter group (much depends on one's boss and working environment).

The second section of Ferriss's book reads more like a lifestyle guide for the extended traveler. Drawing from his own experiences staying in youth hostels and modest rental accommodations, Ferriss shows his readers how to leave their cubicles behind and travel the world for months at a time on a realistic budget.

For the sake of brevity, this overview will focus on the first section only. But if you are planning an extended vacation any time soon, consider reading part two of Ferriss's book before you book your plane tickets. You may save a few bucks.

But focusing now on the main subject matter, a central theme of the book's first section is what Ferriss calls the "deferred-life plan." It's also the villain of Ferriss's book — i.e. the conventional path of working for 40 years in order to fund a 20-
year retirement in the "golden" years of ones life. According to Ferriss, the deferred-life model is both escapable, and very much worth escaping. As an alternative, he floats the idea of taking many "mini-retirements" throughout one's life. Don't wait until your late 50s or early 60s to take a few months off, he urges.

Ferriss's pathway to easy money and lifelong mini-retirements is a neat little escape vehicle called "lifestyle design." It's basically a series of tricks and techniques through which his readers can reconfigure their lives to increase income, create more free time, and spend more time traveling. Ferriss takes us through each of these in turn, offering a series of unorthodox proposals both for entrepreneurs and for the employed, all wrapped-up in a strategy he calls DEAL.

What's the DEAL?

Drawing from his own life experiences, and also based on his first-hand research involving other members of the so-called "New Rich" (not to be confused with the "newly rich"), Ferriss has uncovered four basic, universal steps needed to make the 4-hour workweek a reality: Definition, Elimination, Automation and Liberation.

Definition

D for definition is about turning "misguided" common sense upside down, and understanding the rules and objectives of the new game. According to Ferriss, the biggest myth we need to disabuse ourselves of is that earning more money will somehow solve our work-life balance problems. Unless coupled with other strategies, adding more money to the mix rarely accomplishes anything. And wishing for more money is equally pointless. Ferriss argues that the "If only I had more money" excuse is the easiest way to postpone the intense self-examination and decision-making that's necessary to create a life of great enjoyment — now rather than later. By using money as our scapegoat, and thinking we require more of it than we actually do, we're just spinning our wheels.

Ferriss says his great epiphany came when he realized that, yes, money is important, but relative income is actually more important than absolute income. To the growing members of the New Rich, a dollar is not a dollar. A person's time must also be factored in. For instance, if Jane earns $100,000 per year working 80 hours per week, and Sandy earns the same amount working only half as much, then Sandy is twice as rich. Once your relative income adds up to what is actually required to achieve a defined goal or goals — whether that's raising horses or sailing around the world — you've clearly earned enough.

The problem, writes Ferriss, is that too few people truly know what they want. It's impossible to know when you've earned money enough to achieve your goals unless you've sat down and defined your goals ahead of time. And don't discourage yourself right off the bat by labeling a particular life goal as unrealistic unless you've thoroughly looked into it. "Things often cost much, much less than you'd expect," says Ferriss. This is particularly true when it comes to travel.
Once you've defined your goals, the next three steps help you achieve them.

Elimination (Less is More)

Whether they're working for themselves, or for someone else, Ferriss urges his readers to start moving to a shorter work week without further delay. And the key to doing that is eliminating mundane tasks that aren't absolutely necessary.

The author stresses that the all-important Elimination step isn't about better time management: It doesn't matter whether you're able to do more and more things within the same timeframe — to become more efficient, that is — without caring whether the tasks you're doing actually make any sense, or not. It's actually about becoming more effective by focusing only on the things that really matter.

Not surprisingly, Ferriss is a big proponent of the tried and true Pareto Principle (i.e. the 80/20 rule). That 20% of your tasks/customers/obligations triggers 80% of your problems and unhappiness. Get rid of them! says Ferriss. Be ruthless, if necessary. And vice versa: the 20% of sources that lead to 80% of your desired outcomes and happiness? Focus on them with all your energy.

To know whether you're applying the Pareto Principle for maximum impact, Ferriss suggests you ask yourself every now and then during your day: "Am I being productive, or just busy? Am I inventing little tasks to avoid doing a big, important one?" Another good question to ask before starting any new task: "If this is the only thing I accomplish today, will I be satisfied with my day?"

If neither of those questions work for you, Ferriss asks you to imagine you've suffered a heart attack and are allowed by your doctor to work only two hours per day. What would you do during those two hours? That really puts things into focus.

As part of implementing the 80/20 rule at work, Ferriss urges his readers to "interrupt interruptions." By definition, an interruption is anything (positive or negative) that prevents the start-to-finish completion of a mission-critical task. In Ferriss's view, almost all interruptions are pure evil and should be — interrupted.

Ferriss lists three categories of interruptions: (1) time wasters, (2) time consumers and (3) empowerment failure.

The prototype time waster is the unnecessary e-mail alarm (Ding! You Have Mail!). Turn it off, he says. He suggests reading your e-mail only twice per day, say at 11:00am and at 3:00pm. Then, configure an autoresponder to inform all e-mail senders about this policy and give a phone number for real emergencies.

In terms of time consumers, Ferriss puts face-to-face meetings at the top of his list. "Meetings should be avoided at all costs, especially if there is any doubt as to the decision required, or the question to be answered." Should there appear to be any doubt, Ferriss recommends clarifying any confusion ahead of the meeting,
preferably via e-mail. Ferriss says his favorite ways of communicating are, in descending order: 1. e-mail, 2. phone, 3. personal meeting, if necessary.

The third most common type of avoidable interruption, empowerment failure, typically results from micro-management. If you, or your boss, feel you need to have the final word on all minutiae, then being consulted for every tiny step becomes the rule. Important tasks get killed that way. Ferriss says that implementing a general policy can work miracles in these types of situations. For example, get your boss to agree that if you can fix the problem for less than $100 (for example), you are authorized to proceed without asking, and then do so. Or, if you’re the boss, then authorize your suppliers or business partners to go ahead and make fixes on their own, provided they do not exceed a certain cost, or violate prescribed boundary conditions. Occasional reviews of the results are all it takes — more frequently at first, and then less often as time goes on.

Coupled with these avoidable interruptions at work, Ferriss also believes that most of us are "overeating" useless information in our personal time, which he compares to "devouring empty calories." In his view, most of the information we hear is either irrelevant, unimportant, or cannot be acted upon. For this reason, he recommends voluntarily going on a low-information diet, starting with a week long media fast. That means no mind-numbing TV, no news magazines, and above all, no pointless Internet surfing. The time saved should then be re-invested in family, friends, physical activity ... or some combination thereof.

Automation

Believe it or not, you can earn good money while you're asleep. Tim Ferriss does. All you need is a good idea, and an automated selling process.

Sadly, Ferriss won't provide you with the million-dollar idea. He's not apologizing for keeping those to himself. But what he will give you is the process around it. The one that lets you sleep (or do other cool things) while the easy cash rolls in.

Like most of the other elements in Ferriss's book, automation can be exploited both by employees and entrepreneurs alike, but the advantages can be exponential for the latter group. Your ultimate goal, he says, should be to own your own company and to invest as little time as possible into maintaining it. That's why Ferriss doesn't refer to it as a "business," but rather as a "muse." Quite simply, a muse is an automated vehicle for generating cash without consuming time. Ferriss doesn't believe service-oriented businesses make good muses. They require too much hands-on effort. Instead, you need a product.

Whatever your product may happen to be (vitamins, rare books, reports...), Ferriss offers dozens of useful tips on how to set-up a no-hassle Web site and back-end function that essentially takes care of itself. His key suggestions include streamlining the process as much as possible by offering fewer ordering options (no phone). At first glance, it may seem outrageous not to offer customers a 1-800 number, until you realize that success stories like Amazon.com have depended on a 100% online ordering process as a fundamental way of keeping labor costs
Ferriss also recommends limiting the payment options available to customers, and certainly avoiding risky and/or troublesome ways. In his own experience, Ferriss has found that payments via Western Union, checks and/or money orders are far more likely to lead to delivery or processing problems than credit cards. He also cautions his readers against accepting orders from common mail fraud countries, such as Nigeria. Be sure to receive payment in advance.

Finally, the author recommends offering only one or two delivery options, and certainly no express delivery. It just raises a stream of worried requests by anxious customers.

Another key step involves maximizing your use of "Geo-Arbitrage" (that's fancy-speak for outsourcing). For Ferriss, it all comes down to calculating your "cost per completed task." Depending on the task, virtual assistants located in various parts of the world can be called upon to help you out, often at a fraction of the cost. Also, different time zones can be worked to your advantage if you delegate tasks in the evening and find them done, in your mailbox, in the morning.

If the initial results of your foray into the world of Geo-Arbitrage are less than stellar, Ferriss urges you not to throw up your hands right away. "Good preparation is up to you," he says. Also, he recommends only delegating "well-defined and especially time-consuming tasks." The processes and rules to be followed have to be crystal clear upfront, which requires some initial effort on your part. But the payoff down the road can be enormous once you get going.

But remember, "To eliminate is better than to delegate, since a nonsensical task just eats up money, whether in your country or on the other side of the globe."

Liberation (Getting away from it all)

According to Ferriss, it's not a specific income, car or leisure activity that defines America's middle class. Instead, he believes the middle class can be best described as a group of hardworking people who are chained to one place.

Ferriss's program promises to liberate his readers from those shackles. But it won't happen all at once, particularly if you're currently an employee, as opposed to an entrepreneur. In order to physically escape the office as an employee, you obviously need permission to work remotely. This permission may be hard to come by, so Ferriss suggests tackling this challenge through a series of steps. The first, and most important, is to increase your value for the company. It all begins with the money your company is investing in you. You become a more valuable asset after you've received expensive training that your company has invested in. That's why you should always be on the lookout for new training opportunities, says Ferriss. Training is not just for life-long learning purposes.

Secondly, you need to demonstrate the benefits of remote work. A great
opportunity is when you call in sick. Show your employer that while you may not be able to go to the office, you can still get some work done at home. If you're disciplined, your sick day work should turn out to be at least the same, or even more, than what you can normally achieve during a regular day at the office. Make sure your boss notices this fact, says Ferriss, and attribute it to being able to fully concentrate on your tasks due to a lack of interruptions. Remember too that higher productivity can be more impressive when expressed using statistics.

Once your employer begins to warm up to the idea of a little remote work, suggest a revocable trial period of one or two days per week at home. It goes without saying that your remote work needs to be much more productive than your usual 9-5 office performance, at least for the first few months anyway.

Of course, no matter how you slice and dice it, working remotely for someone else will always be a poor cousin to working remotely for yourself. Killing your job altogether may be frightening, but it's also the pathway to optimal freedom.

**Life After Work**

So, what happens after you've got rid of (almost) all your work and you've got more free time on your hands than you ever wished for? Well, in a word, nothing. "Nothing ever just happens," says Ferriss, "you have to make it happen."

Of course, Ferriss acknowledges that it would be entirely understandable if, at first, you gave in to your base impulses and simply sat on your rump for a while. At some point in time, however, having that third cocktail at a hotel bar before noon on a Thursday just doesn't provide quite the same kick anymore. Little doubts start to creep in. And boredom gradually becomes a force to be reckoned with.

Don't sweat it, says Ferriss. There is a natural reason why such questions emerge. After subtracting work from your days, you need to add life to them!

In his own life, Ferriss has filled the void by becoming a part-time resident of foreign countries. He's experienced substantial personal growth by learning new languages, exploring new cultures, and largely just mingling about. And if you're daring enough to take a page from his book — literally and figuratively — Ferriss believes that traveling can absolutely become a rewarding, full-time occupation.

**Conclusion**

Although he's only 29 years old, Tim Ferriss has lived the rat race and he's seen the destruction it can cause. The 4-Hour Workweek offers us a welcome alternative.

If the pressure of working 12-hour days and checking your e-mail every second is finally getting to you, there's still hope. Sure, there's no question that Ferriss's strategies are boundary pushing, and some may feel, even a bit crazy. Yet, each
and every idea has been Ferriss-tested, and they do work ... for him at least. There's only one way to find out if they can work for you as well. Tim Ferriss is living proof that there is a better way. The 4-Hour Workweek is your blueprint for making it happen.