

Starting the Day on My Own Terms

I don't have a morning routine.

Sometimes I experiment with one, other times I alter my mornings based on other larger goals. In some phases of life, I've slept in 'till eight or nine. In others I've gotten up at five or six. Sometimes I do both from day to day.

I've done email first thing, writing first thing, exercise first thing, meditation, walking, eating, showering, or reading first thing. I've smoked a cigar first thing. I've gone screenless and screenful.

I like them all. Mostly I like to straddle the boundary between routine and change. I don't want complete novelty every day, but I like changes with phases and goals. I've had phases where never waking up to an alarm clock was a goal I worked hard to achieve. Other times the alarm is integral.

The only thing I've really noticed that consistently makes mornings good is starting them on my own terms. It doesn't really matter what the terms are. The only thing I've really noticed that makes mornings bad is starting them on other people's terms. It doesn't really matter what the terms are.

Earlier in life, if I didn't set the terms they would be set by work or classes. Now if I don't set the terms they're set by my kids. Since my wife and I accidentally spread out our four kids over 13 years, it feels like we're always in a phase where somebody wakes up early (and usually someone has a hard time sleeping and wakes up in the night too). Getting enough sleep is tough enough. Getting it between the hours we'd prefer is almost impossible. So we tend to trade off who has get up in the night and get up early in the morning duty.

When I let the first kid to awake dictate the start of my day, it takes me several hours to stop feeling chaotic. But when I get up a little before the first kid normally gets up, everything changes.

Even if the activities don't change, the mindset does. I feel like I'm tackling the day, not the other way around.

This is true of most things in life. It's not the terms, but the feeling that you determined them that makes for a good life.