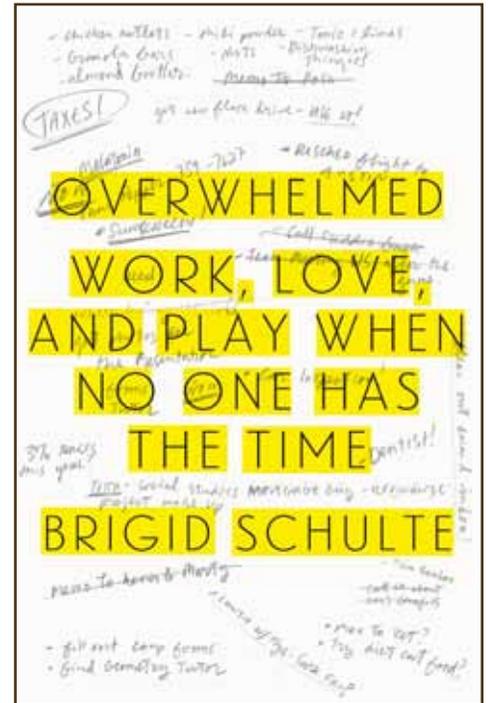


Reading Group Gold

Overwhelmed *Work, Love, and* *Play When No One* *Has the Time* by Brigid Schulte



ISBN: 978-0-374-22844-6 / 368 pages

An award-winning journalist and harried mother of two, Brigid Schulte spent her days racing from one deadline to the next. A good night's sleep and leisure time? Impossible in her demanding world. Yet researchers insist that Americans are actually rolling in leisure time; it's the perception of busyness we're addicted to. In *Overwhelmed*, Schulte speaks to neuroscientists, sociologists, and hundreds of working parents to examine the factors contributing to our collective sense of being overwhelmed. She investigates progressive offices that have invented a liberating yet highly productive kind of workplace. She travels across Europe, where shorter work hours and longer vacation periods are the cultural norm. And she examines her own communities to uncover the roots of our seemingly time-crunched culture. The result is an inspiring new vision of the Good Life—and an urgent, invigorating plan for change.

This guide is designed to enrich your discussion of *Overwhelmed*. We hope that the following questions will enhance your reading group's experience of Brigid Schulte's timely call to action.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. If you started keeping a time diary, what categories would you want to create? Would you follow John Robinson's definition of leisure? Which category consumes most of your time right now?

Reading Group Gold

2. In your family, how has the delegation of household duties changed over the generations? Did your childhood feature many scheduled activities, or did you have unstructured time? Did your parents embrace the idea of leisure and vacations?
3. How have you been affected by the increasing demands placed on salaried workers in an age of 24/7 availability? Who at your company would need to be convinced that reduced work hours and increased flexibility in scheduling could actually lead to increased productivity and profit?
4. How did you react to the author's interviews with Pat Buchanan and other traditionalists? What sustains their point of view?
5. What would it take for programs such as the Menlo Innovations approach in Ann Arbor and the Alternative Work Schedule at the Pentagon to become the norm throughout the United States? What do the book's progressive examples tell us about the best way to achieve change?
6. What are the most frequent contributors to your time confetti? If you could convert all of your confetti into leisure time, would you feel guilty?
7. Discuss the true equality proposed by Jessica DeGroot at ThirdPath Institute. Have you seen it in action in your community?
8. How would you respond to those who say women have only themselves to blame for the inequities they endure in the ratio of leisure time to "on call" time? What enabled Schulte to leave her kids behind and trust Tom? How did that help them work through their impasse?
9. What is at the root of discrimination against working moms, both in the workplace and among certain circles of stay-at-home moms? What do cases such as that of Renate Rivelli, the Brown Palace Hotel employee described in chapter 5, illustrate about the grossly inaccurate perceptions of a working mother's capabilities?
10. How would you answer the central questions posed by Schulte in chapter 9: who's right, what's best, and how do we stop the insanity? What did you learn from her sojourn in Denmark, where work hours are shorter and highly focused while the economy remains robust? How could the concept of *hygge* help us redefine the ideal standard of living?
11. In your opinion, why does the ideal of the self-sacrificing mother persist, despite the gains of the feminist movement? Why have so many American families resisted the fact that dads also have a parenting instinct, and that a diverse caretaking community can have a highly positive impact on a child's well-being?
12. One of the findings presented in *Overwhelmed* is the notion that grit and self-confidence, rather than income or GPA, are strong predictors of happiness. What do our barometers of success say

Reading Group Gold

about our real values as a society? Is happiness—whose pursuit is touted in the Declaration of Independence—still valued in the United States?

13. Discuss the concept of contaminated time. Knowing that the brain's working memory can hold only seven pieces of information at once, how would you begin to clear your cluttered mind—even if the responsibilities of work and home seem to follow you 24/7? What kind of space would “decontamination” create in your life?
14. *Overwhelmed* underscores the fact that years of history and cultural conditioning have spurred women to work harder than men, even during supposed time off: If a woman wants to watch TV, she'd better fold some laundry while she's at it. If she'd like to read a book, she should do it on the treadmill. On family “vacations,” Mom will make sure that all of the kids' needs are met. Does this ring true for you? Do the men and women in your world manage time differently? If so, what can they do to silence that little voice that says women don't deserve to rest? What would motivate you to give yourself a break, even if it incites uproar at first?
15. Drawing on the author's closing advice to “do one thing,” which of her changes will you implement in work, play, and love? What predictions would you make about the way future generations will balance their time among parenting, career, and leisure?

PRAISE FOR *OVERWHELMED*

“*Overwhelmed* is a superb report from the front lines of the sputtering gender revolution. Brigid Schulte takes up the perennial problem of women's ‘second shift’ with fresh energy and fascinating new data, effortlessly blending academic findings and mothers' lived experiences, including her own often hilarious attempts to be both the perfect parent and a successful full-time journalist. Before you embark on parenthood, before you volunteer to make cupcakes for a school party or stay up late to finish a fourth grader's science project—and definitely before you pick up another copy of *Martha Stewart Living*—read this book!” —Barbara Ehrenreich, author of *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*

“Reflecting on her meticulous research, searching her feelings, and renegotiating the division of emotional labor with her husband, Tom, Brigid Schulte offers us a well-written and timely book, both witty and wise.” —Arlie Hochschild, author of *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*

“Beautifully written, with searing facts, engaging stories, illuminating history, and wry personal observations. A must-read by a truly perceptive author!” —John de Graaf, editor of *Take Back Your Time: Fighting Overwork and Time Poverty in America*

Reading Group Gold

“Why is life so insanely busy? What happened to ‘leisure’ time? Tired of the modern hamster wheel, Brigid Schulte set out to find a better way to live. Her voice is delightful, her findings surprising and hopeful. *Overwhelmed* is a passionate, funny, very human book that reads like a detective story.”
—William Powers, author of *Hamlet’s BlackBerry: Building a Good Life in the Digital Age*

“*Overwhelmed* is a time management book that’s not just about how to be more productive and effective—it’s about the broad and fascinating role time plays in our emotional satisfaction, our physical health, and even our notions of gender equality. The more overwhelmed you feel, the more crucial it is to take the time to read this important book.” —Daniel H. Pink, author of *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*

“Every parent, every caregiver, every person who feels besieged by permanent busyness, must read this book. A new wave of research, experience, and insight is challenging deep assumptions about why we have to live and work the way we do. *Overwhelmed* is a wake-up call and an exhilarating prescription for change.” —Anne-Marie Slaughter, president and CEO of the New America Foundation and author of “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brigid Schulte is an award-winning journalist for *The Washington Post* and *The Washington Post Magazine*, and was part of a team that won the Pulitzer Prize. She is also a fellow at the New America Foundation. She lives in Alexandria, Virginia, with her husband and their two children.

Guide written by Amy Clements