The Otium Method™

HOW IT WORKS

It starts with *your day.*

A guide to the six stages, for leaders and their PAs.

Lifestyle through technology

James Brand

otium

LATIN, NOUN

Time free from business. Time to think, to read, to be with family, to have ideas.

Its opposite was *negotium*, the Roman word for business. Literally, not leisure.

Your time back, *and what it's for.*

Most AI training starts with the tools. I start with your day.

I sit alongside you, travel with you if that's where your day happens, and see where your time really goes. Then we build a practical plan around three things: time, money and choice. The fix might be AI, a better report or a simple workflow.

I won't do it for you. I'll get you to the point where you can do it yourself, with confidence.

You'll also work with Paul Stephenson, Executive Guide, Symmetry Global. Together you'll work out what the time is for. Hours back mean little without a reason to want them.

TIME

Hours back for the work you love.

MONEY

Your attention where it creates the most value.

CHOICE

You decide what gets your energy, and when you switch off.

WHY OTIUM

The Romans' word for time free from business: time to think, to read, to be with family, to have ideas.

James Brand

Founder, The Otium Method

The time technology *promised us.*

15 hours

The working week Keynes predicted in 1930

40%

of people online at 6am are already in email

117

emails a day, plus 153 Teams messages

In 1930 Keynes predicted that rising prosperity would bring his grandchildren a 15-hour working week. The prosperity came: output in industrialised countries has grown four to eight times. The short week never did.

Every wave of technology was sold as a way to save time. Email, the smartphone, WhatsApp and video calls each made a task faster, then filled the space they made. Work came home, then to bed, then into the weekend.

Some countries now give workers a legal right to disconnect, starting with France in 2017. Those laws rarely reach the top. Leaders set the pattern, and a leader who answers at midnight teaches the team to do the same.

THE AI ROUND

AI is arriving the same way as everything before it: bolted on top and measured by volume. Left to itself, it will fill the day faster than anything that came before. So this time, we claim it. We start with your day, set technology up around the life you want, and make sure you can run it yourself.

The time technology promised, *finally claimed.*

Sources: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Monthly Labor Review (May 2024), on Keynes's 1930 essay. Microsoft Work Trend Index, Breaking down the infinite workday (June 2025). NPR (26 August 2024).

Six stages, *each with something you keep.*

	STAGE	YOU KEEP
	Before Fit, ground rules and a baseline	**Otium Agreement**
1	Observe A day alongside you, wherever it happens	**Day Map**
2	Untangle What I saw, sorted by time, money and choice	**Untangle Board**
3	Build A plan, and tools set up around your real day	**Otium Plan**
4	Practise You use it, with me beside you, until it's yours	**Practitioner check**
5	Purpose With Paul Stephenson, what the hours are for	**Purpose Statement**
6	Pass it on You show the people around you what's possible	**Ripple Plan**
	After Six signals measured again at 90 days	**90 Day Review**

The six stages take about twelve weeks, and we meet again 90 days after Practise ends. Paul Stephenson, Executive Guide, Symmetry Global, works with you throughout. Stage 5 is where his work comes to the front.

First, *we agree it's a fit.*

Nothing is set up and no tool is discussed until we've done these four things.

1 **A first conversation**

About where your day goes. If you've done the Where does your day go? self-audit, bring your score.

2 **A fit check**

This works for leaders who love their business, want to stay in the role and are ready to learn to do it themselves, with help beside them. If it isn't right for you, I'll say so.

3 **The Otium Agreement**

Scope, dates and observation days, agreed in writing along with the ground rules below.

4 **A baseline**

A short check on six signals, so there's a clear before.

GROUND RULES FOR THE OBSERVATION DAY

- You tell the people you'll meet that I'm there, and why.
- I step out of anything confidential, no questions asked.
- No audio, video or screenshots. My notes cover time and patterns, not content.
- The notes are yours. At the end you get the Observation Log, and I delete my copy.
- If your company wants an NDA, we sign it before the day.

1

OBSERVE

I watch. *I don't fix anything yet.*

At least one typical day alongside you, wherever it happens: the office, the car, the flight. If your week has two shapes, such as an office day and a travel day, we add a second.

BEFORE THE DAY

- Pick a normal day, not a showcase. Board days and conference days don't count.
- List every route a request can take: email, WhatsApp, Teams, calls, your PA, people at the door.

ON THE DAY, I NOTE

Activity
What you're doing, and for how long

Route in
Diary, message, call or interruption

Only you?
Whether anyone else could have done it

Energy
Whether it gave you energy or took it

Switches
Each time your attention jumped

Noise
What got through despite the diary and your PA

The evening counts too. I won't be there, so you keep a short note that night: when work stopped, and what came in after.

YOU KEEP

The Day Map

One page, within a week: where the time went, what drained your energy, where the noise got in, and how much of your day reached the work only you can do.

2

UNTANGLE

Four piles. *You make the call.*

We sort everything on the Day Map into four piles, then score each item on time, money and choice. You make the final call on every item.

Only you

Would the business lose value if someone else did it?

We protect it, and make more room for it.

Technology

Could software, a report, a workflow or AI do it faster?

It goes into Build.

Team

Could someone do it well with a clear handover?

A handover, finished in Pass it on.

Stop

Would anyone notice if it stopped?

We stop it, and tell whoever needs to know.

SCORING

Each item gets 0, 1 or 2 for time, money and choice. Zero means no help, two means a lot. An item scoring zero on all three isn't worth changing.

THE ART OF BUSINESS

The things only you can do, and love doing, get marked. They're what the whole plan exists to protect.

YOU KEEP

The Untangle Board

Every item with its pile and score, highest total first.

3

BUILD

Your plan, *on one page.*

We turn the top of the Untangle Board into the Otium Plan, then set up the right technology around your real day. That might be AI, a better report or a simple workflow. Your hands are on the keyboard, not mine.

The Otium Plan

ONE PAGE

What we're protecting
The work only you can do, and love doing.

What the team takes
Who takes what, and from when.

The boundaries
When the day ends, the one route for anything urgent, and what your PA filters.

What technology takes
Each item, the tool by name, and what it gives back.

What stops
And who needs to know.

What the time is for
From your work with Paul Stephenson. The plan isn't finished until this is filled in.

EVERY TOOL EARNS ITS PLACE

1. Which of time, money or choice does it give back?
2. Does it add a new place to check? If so, it needs a strong reason.
3. Can you and your team run it without me?
4. Has your company's IT or data owner agreed to it?

One change at a time, highest score first. No more than three bedding in at once.

Bigger builds. Anything more than a light build is scoped separately, for your IT team or a supplier you choose. If one of my companies could do it, I'll tell you first.

YOU KEEP
The Otium Plan
Agreed by you, with the tools working on your own devices.

4

PRACTISE

Until it's *yours.*

You use the set-up in real work, with me alongside, until you can run it and set up the next thing without me. Practise ends when you pass the practitioner check, not on a date.

HOW IT RUNS

Sessions happen inside your real day, not in a training room. Between sessions you keep a short Practice Log of what worked and what got in the way.

THE PRACTITIONER CHECK

You can:

- explain why each change is there and what it gives back
- run every part of the set-up without help for two weeks
- fix the usual problems yourself
- spot the next thing technology could take, and set it up yourself
- show one part to someone else

I'm an enabler. *I won't do it for you.*

Work done for you stops when the consultant leaves. Skills you own keep growing.

YOU KEEP

The skills

The practitioner check passed, and your second baseline taken.

5

PURPOSE

Hours back mean little *without a reason.*

Technology can win back the hours. It can't tell you what you want them for. That's where Paul Stephenson comes in.

Paul Stephenson

EXECUTIVE GUIDE, SYMMETRY GLOBAL

Paul Stephenson looks after the person behind the role. His approach is holistic: he works with the whole person, which is how changes last and how the work starts to mean something again. His work runs alongside the whole programme, and stage 5 is where it comes to the front.

I've been through his process myself. It reshaped my business and what I spend my time on. That's why he's part of this. **James Brand**

WHAT PASSES IN

After Observe, your Day Map and baseline go to Paul Stephenson, with your permission.

WHAT COMES OUT

At the end of stage 5, your Purpose Statement goes into the Otium Plan.

Privacy. What you tell Paul Stephenson stays between the two of you, unless you choose to share it.

YOU KEEP

The Purpose Statement

A few lines in your own words. The idea you keep putting aside. Dinner at home, fully present. Enjoying the business you built.

6

PASS IT ON

One leader *at a time.*

You show the people around you what's changed, so your team has permission to follow.

Say what's changed

For example: I've stopped replying after seven. If it's urgent, here's how to reach me.

Finish the handovers

Everything in the Team pile moves to its new owner.

Use it in plain sight

Show one new tool or report openly, in a team meeting.

Pick who goes next

One or two people who'd benefit, inside the business or outside it.

THE RIPPLE

You

Your time back, and a clear answer to what it's for.

Your team

When the midnight messages stop, they stop feeling they have to answer.

Their families

The team gets its evenings back too, and the people at home feel it.

This is also how new technology, AI included, spreads best. A leader who uses it well, in plain sight, gives everyone else permission to try.

YOU KEEP

The Ripple Plan — What's been said, what's been handed over and who goes next.

For the person *who guards the diary.*

You already work hard to protect the diary. Even so, emails, WhatsApps and requests still find their way through. This method works on the rest, and it needs you to make it stick.

BEFORE THE OBSERVATION DAY

The PA Briefing

A short session and a one-page brief: what's happening and why, and the ground rules. What I need from you:

- a typical day for me to observe
- every route a request can take
- access on the day

DURING BUILD

The PA Guide

The new boundaries, written up for you:

- the one route for anything urgent
- what gets filtered
- when the day ends
- who now owns each item handed to the team

YOUR PART

Help arrange the observation day.

Run the agreed filters and routes.

Hold the boundaries when they're tested.

TO ARRANGE A FIRST CONVERSATION

theotiummethod.com

or message James Brand on LinkedIn: linkedin.com/in/james-brand-tech

We measure it *three times.*

Hours saved is the first measure, and the least important one. We check six signals at the start, at the end of Practise and 90 days later.

Time

Hours back each week, and a clear answer to where they went.

Head space

A clear diary and a clear head. Fewer messages finding their way through.

Evenings

Switching off by choice, and being fully present at home.

The idea

Something started that had been put off for years.

Practitioner

Setting up the next tool, report or AI use without help.

The team

People around you starting to work differently.

THE 90 DAY REVIEW

We compare the three readings, adjust the plan and decide whether anything else is needed.

YOUR STORY

With your permission, I write up your before and after, named or anonymous.

EVERYTHING YOU KEEP

- Observation Log
- Untangle Board
- Practice Log
- Ripple Plan
- Day Map
- Otium Plan
- Purpose Statement
- Your before and after

Eight checks *before anything reaches you.*

Every piece of work passes all eight. One no, and it doesn't go out.

1 **Power over volume**
Does it add weight to a few decisions, or just help you do more?

2 **Start with the day**
Is it based on what I saw, not a tool I like?

3 **See it before you fix it**
Did I see it, or am I assuming it?

4 **Enable, then step back**
Can you run it without me?

5 **Time needs a purpose**
Do we know what this time is for?

6 **The whole person**
Does it work for your health, family and energy, not just the diary?

7 **Stay and enjoy it**
Does it help you enjoy the role?

8 **Technology earns its place**
Which of time, money or choice does it give back, and does it add noise?

A GOOD FIT

- Your head is full even when the diary is clear
- You want to stay in the role and enjoy it again
- You're ready to learn and do it yourself
- You'll go first, so your team can follow

NOT THE RIGHT FIT

- You want a report to read and file
- You're after a software licence or a tool demo
- You're planning to walk away from the business

Getting time back is the easy part. *What is it for?*

Three questions to sit with. Write your answers here, and bring them to our first conversation.

1 If you had five hours back every week, what would you do with them?

2 What's the idea you keep putting aside?

3 When did you last spend an evening fully present?

Notes

Feel the power, *not the volume.*

Let's start with your day.

I take on a small number of leaders at a time, because each one gets whole days of my time.

James Brand

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In partnership with Symmetry Global