

Hacking Life • Hacking Life

Acknowledgments

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To Mom—who taught me my first hack of tying shoes.

All of us have a little life hacker in us. I have a fair amount. My thinking strongly tilts toward the rational style. When I write, I work in chunks, separated by breaks. To keep myself accountable, I track my daily words written and hours on task. I don't like clutter and do like to keep things organized. I've struggled with health concerns and the health care system. I use typing-break timers and an unusual keyboard. When I feel a cold coming on, I take a zinc lozenge—even though I suspect it is a placebo. I am far from gregarious, and at big gatherings I create challenges for myself, such as introducing myself to three strangers. I am an anxious person and find levity in Marcus Aurelius and calm in a decade-plus mindfulness practice. I am also a white male with a computer science degree: true to type, so far. However, I don't track much else and have no desire or expectation of uploading myself into a computer. If forced to choose between Soylent (soy-based), Huel (oat-based), and MealSquares (brownie-like), I prefer Huel, but would much rather have a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich.

I took on this project to better understand life hacking given that I find it both compelling and, at times, concerning. What I learned is the focus of this book, but I don't conclude that this self-help for the digital age is wholly helpful or harmful, or even novel. It's more complicated than that, as are the stories of those who share the hacking mind-set.

I extend my thanks to those who shared their motivations, practices, and hesitations in hacking life. Most were enthusiasts, but this doesn't mean they were without their own questions and concerns. Indeed, so much of life hacking is an experiment. I apologize that a few the people I spoke with don't appear in the following pages, but my discussions with them still informed my understanding and writing; this includes Jon Cousins, Maggie Delano, Awais Hussain, and others who wished to remain anonymous.

Between my sources and those who read drafts are those who answered factual questions or reviewed sections of prose. These are people whom I followed online or in print and who helped me get closer to getting their stories right. This includes Danny O'Brien, Danny Reeves, Bethany Soule, Richard Sprague, Gina Trapani, Tynan, Amy Webb, and Nick Winter. Thank you.

Most importantly, there are those who helped me with the manuscript itself.

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Manaktala, editorial director at the MIT Press, patiently answered my many questions. Michael Harrup and Kathleen Caruso were thorough copyeditors. Other folks at MIT Press who also helped include Kyle Gipson, Gabriela Bueno Gibbs, Judy Feldmann, Victoria Hindley, Sean Reilly, and Michael Sims. I am sure there are others.

I am indebted to a handful of scholars. I don't think anyone usually enjoys reading PhD dissertations, but I read Matt Thomas's excellent "Life Hacking: A Critical History, 2004–2014" with rapt attention. Alongside Joey Daoud's 2010 documentary, *You 2.0—A Documentary on Life Hacking*, Thomas's work is an early and important treatment of this topic. Thomas also gave me feedback on my initial efforts. Natasha Schüll read the whole manuscript and also helped with a suggestion toward the title of the book. Rebecca Jablonsky reviewed the introduction and chapter on health hacking. Meryl Alper, my office neighbor at Northeastern University, kindly shared her expertise and sources on cognitive diversity. Bess Williamson shared her work on the importance of the disability community's history of hacking. Benjamin Hunnicutt corresponded with me about ancient and medieval notions of procrastination. I also received useful feedback from anonymous peer reviewers.

Thanks also to the friends who shared their time with me. Valerie Aurora and Noam Cohen read the whole manuscript and, among other things, independently pushed me to be more rigorous about hacker ethics. Alex Censullo, a former student, also read it all and noted a number of rough spots needing refinement. Amy Gilson made good suggestions on the chapter on relationships.

Finally, Nora Schaddelee read drafts of each chapter. I can only hope my bread baking provides some sort of redress. I'm also grateful when Casper reminds it's time for a computer break—with a nudge to my calf to shepherd me along.