



## Oliver Burkeman

**AUTHOR · JOURNALIST**

Productivity investment keeps rising. So does overload. The problem is not that organisations lack better time management systems. It is that the logic of “getting on top of things” is itself the mechanism that generates the pressure it claims to solve. Leaders who feel this but cannot name it are making cultural and structural decisions on a false premise.

The case that productivity culture systematically intensifies overload, rather than resolving it is what Oliver Burkeman, former Guardian columnist and New York Times bestselling author of *Four Thousand Weeks*, has built across two national bestselling books, giving leaders a named framework and practical tools for working with human limits rather than against them.

### Oliver Burkeman's 2026 Biography

#### Why organisations work with Oliver Burkeman

- His “efficiency trap” argument; that pursuing greater efficiency increases the demands made on time rather than reducing them, gives leaders a named, evidence-based explanation for why their productivity programmes are making things worse. This is not a motivational reframe; it is a structural diagnosis.
- *Four Thousand Weeks* and *Meditations for Mortals* are already in the hands of senior leaders and knowledge workers. A session with Burkeman builds on a shared conceptual vocabulary rather than introducing one from scratch, which shortens the distance from insight to action.
- His “imperfectionism” framework, developed in *Meditations for Mortals*, gives teams a practical operating principle: that meaningful action does not require ideal conditions, and that waiting for control is itself the performance problem.
- He approaches this as a journalist with fourteen years of empirical investigation into the psychology of time and attention, not as a consultant with a methodology to sell. His arguments are critical rather than prescriptive, which gives them greater durability in boardroom and executive conversations.
- Two national bestsellers, two TEDx talks, and a decade-long BBC Radio 4 presenting record mean his material has been tested across audiences, formats, and cultures without dilution.

#### AVAILABLE FOR

- Speaking

#### OLIVER'S SPEAKING THEMES

- Behavioural Economics
- Corporate Culture
- Employee Wellbeing
- Future of Work
- Leadership
- Mental Health in the Workplace

**LANGUAGES: English**

## Biography highlights

- Author of *Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals* (2021, Farrar, Straus and Giroux), New York Times and Sunday Times bestseller; named one of the best books of 2021 by the Financial Times, The Times, The Observer, Audible, Time, and Barnes & Noble
- Author of *Meditations for Mortals* (2024, Farrar, Straus and Giroux) – national bestseller; introduces his operational philosophy of “imperfectionism”
- Former staff writer and weekly columnist at The Guardian; “This Column Will Change Your Life” ran for fourteen years (2006–2020)
- Writing has appeared in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Psychologies, and New Philosopher
- Winner, Foreign Press Association Young Journalist of the Year Award (2002); shortlisted, Orwell Prize (2006); FPA science story of the year (2015)
- Educated at Christ’s College, Cambridge (BA Social and Political Sciences)
- Presenter of BBC Radio 4 series including “Oliver Burkeman is Busy” and “Living with the News”
- TEDx talks: “How to stop fighting against time” (TEDxUniversityofNicosia) and “Why patience is a superpower” (TEDxManchester)

## Biography

Most senior leaders know their organisations are overloaded. Fewer can explain why every investment in productivity appears to make it worse. Oliver Burkeman spent fourteen years as a columnist and journalist at The Guardian investigating exactly this tension, and his conclusion was not a better system, but a structural critique of the system itself.

His 2021 New York Times and Sunday Times bestseller, *Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals* names this “the efficiency trap”: the more capacity organisations and individuals create, the more demands expand to fill it. The book argues that the premise of eventually getting on top of everything is not a problem to be solved with better methods, but a structural illusion that drives the overload it promises to end. For leaders navigating performance culture debates, it provides intellectual grounding that goes well beyond the self-help category.

His 2024 follow-up, *Meditations for Mortals*, develops a named operational philosophy, “imperfectionism” as a practical alternative. The argument is not that people should do less, but that taking meaningful action requires abandoning the precondition that conditions be ideal first. This gives teams and their leaders a durable, non-sentimental vocabulary for moving from awareness of overload to genuinely different behaviour.

Burkeman trained at Christ’s College, Cambridge, reported from London, Washington, and New York, and was shortlisted for the Orwell Prize. His work has appeared in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and New Philosopher, and he presents BBC Radio 4 series alongside his newsletter, *The Imperfectionist*, which has built a substantial professional following.

## Key speaking topics

- Productivity culture and the efficiency trap
- Time, attention, and human finitude
- Imperfectionism as an organisational operating philosophy

- Burnout, overload, and performance culture
- Meaningful work and prioritisation under constraint
- The psychology of distraction and focus
- Patience as a strategic capability

### **Ideal for**

- CHROs and People directors addressing burnout, overload, and performance culture
- Senior leadership teams reviewing the assumptions underlying their productivity and ways-of-working programmes
- Conference audiences in knowledge-intensive sectors where attention, prioritisation, and sustainable output are live strategic concerns
- Boards and executive teams examining the relationship between culture, wellbeing, and long-term organisational performance

### **Audience outcomes**

- A named framework (the efficiency trap) for explaining why productivity investment can increase rather than reduce overload, applicable immediately in leadership conversations
- Clearer language for the tension between performance expectations and human limits, reducing the vagueness that makes wellbeing conversations difficult to act on
- Familiarity with “imperfectionism” as a practical operating principle for individuals and teams working under conditions of permanent overload
- A reframing of prioritisation: not as a time management technique, but as the fundamental capability that determines organisational focus
- Greater confidence in decisions to stop, delay, or deprioritise – backed by a rigorous philosophical and psychological argument rather than sentiment

## **Oliver Burkeman's 2026 talks & topics**

### **Four Thousand Weeks: Time and How to Use It**

A challenge to efficiency-first assumptions about time management, built around Burkeman’s central argument that the pressure to “get on top of things” structurally intensifies overload rather than resolving it.

#### **Key takeaways:**

- Why the efficiency trap means that doing more reliably generates more demands, not fewer
- Why the central challenge of time management is not efficiency but deciding what to neglect
- Practical tools for building a working life oriented around finite time rather than in resistance to it

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### **Why Patience Is a Superpower**

A counterintuitive case for patience as a high-performance capability in an accelerating business

environment.

### Key takeaways:

- Why speed culture and impatience generate a specific and identifiable category of poor decision-making
- How accepting slower timelines can unlock more durable outcomes than urgency-driven approaches
- A practical reframing of patience from a passive trait to an active strategic choice

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### How to Stop Fighting Against Time

A public talk drawing on *Four Thousand Weeks* to reframe the relationship between productivity, control, and meaningful work.

### Key takeaways:

- Why conventional time management intensifies anxiety rather than reducing it
- The limit-embracing alternative to the control paradigm, and why it produces better outcomes
- How accepting finitude as a starting condition, rather than a problem, generates sharper focus and output

## Oliver Burkeman's 2026 speaking fees

Specific fees fall within the ranges shown. These are presented as a guide only and are subject to change without notice.

	EUR	GBP	USD
<b>Home Country</b>	€12000 to €40000	£10,001 - £35,000	\$15000 - \$50000
<b>Asia Pacific</b>	€12000 to €40000	£10,001 - £35,000	\$15000 - \$50000
<b>Europe</b>	€12000 to €40000	£10,001 - £35,000	\$15000 - \$50000
<b>Middle East &amp; Africa</b>	€12000 to €40000	£10,001 - £35,000	\$15000 - \$50000
<b>South America</b>	€12000 to €40000	£10,001 - £35,000	\$15000 - \$50000
<b>United Kingdom</b>	€12000 to €40000	£10,001 - £35,000	\$15000 - \$50000
<b>US East Coast</b>	€12000 to €40000	£10,001 - £35,000	\$15000 - \$50000
<b>US West Coast</b>	€12000 to €40000	£10,001 - £35,000	\$15000 - \$50000
<b>Virtual</b>	Under €12000	Under £10,000	Under \$15000