This book starts with the premise that lives are getting busier, time is not vanishing but free time is. The author states that we find ourselves doing a stack of jobs we never volunteered for, chores that showed up in our lives below the scan of awareness. The are the incoming tidal wave of shadow work. Shadow work includes all the unpaid tasks we do on behalf of businesses and organisations. The author's key aim is to make the unconscious conscious.

Examples of shadow work:

- Pumping our own gas (this is an American book)
- Scanning and bag our own groceries
- Assembling our own Ikea furniture
- Washing and sorting recycling

Computers are a key source of shadow work. They require i sto delete span, book travel, and manage dozens of usernames and passwords. Gift cards, which give you the job of choosing and buying a gift for yourself come wrapped in shadow work.

Shadow work is empowered by four major forces:

1. Technology and robotics
2. Democratisation of expertise – the average person can now retrieve knowledge once monopolised by experts.
3. Information Dragnet – institutions dedicated to collect data.
4. Evolving social norms.

Historically automation has cut jobs at the point of production. Shadow work deletes jobs at the point of sale – for example checkouts, self check-in, online shopping. Shadow work that requires no training can spread readily. There are however benefits of shadow work. An example cited by the book is the 'Ikea Effect'. Although buying furniture from Ikea creates significant hidden work, making something boost the makers sense of pride and competence.

One way to fight back against shadow work is to hire others. Taking on others, turning unpaid tasks into paid ones. This links to the fact that time is money, and any unit of time can be turned into money. The author goes on to give the example that although secretaries still exist only high-level executives have someone to help them through their daily routine. Receiving live human service has become a mark of the elite.

The penultimate chapter focuses on the shadow work generated by technology – applying upgrades, learning new processes, changing passwords. The author talks about the multi-billion dollar valuation of facebook comes about due to the content generated by its users.

The book ends predicting that shadow work will grow, as it provides large rewards to businesses and organisations.