

THE PRODUCTIVITY BLUEPRINT



2 IN 1
BUNDLE
10 MINUTE FOCUS AND
TAKE BACK YOUR DAY

DANIEL WALTER

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THE PRODUCTIVITY BLUEPRINT 2 IN 1 BUNDLE: 10 Minute Focus
and Take Back Your Day
by Daniel Walter

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10-MINUTE FOCUS

25 HABITS FOR MASTERING YOUR CONCENTRATION
AND ELIMINATING DISTRACTIONS

DANIEL WALTER

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INTRODUCTION

10 minutes. That's how long it takes to do most of the activities in this book. Sometimes even less.

By taking just 10 minutes at the beginning of your day to plan, eliminate distractions, and get your environment ready, you will notice improved focus for the rest of the day. In most cases, forcing yourself to just start a project and work on it for 10 minutes is enough to bring yourself to a state of deep work.

Ah, if only it were that simple. Distractions abound in the modern workplace and sometimes even our best efforts to focus are interrupted by co-workers, email and our own perfectionistic thoughts. That's what this book is about: learning how to take control of your environment, eliminate distractions and get your thoughts working for you instead of against you.

And you're not alone. Focus can be a problem for everyone at times—there are days when you are able to accomplish everything on your to-do list and there are days you cannot seem to get anything done. Your energy levels also seem to fluctuate based on the time of day.

You experience highs when you can just zip through projects and get things done in no time, and then there are the times of day when you cannot get anything done at all because your energy is so low. Of course, this doesn't even take into consideration the fluctuations in focus that can occur as a result of your emotions, as well.

Focus is hard to capture, but if you learn how to use it the right way, you will become more efficient with the work that you get done. This guidebook will provide you with the tools that you need to get your work done without losing focus and falling prey to all the distractions that come up during the day.

This guidebook is divided into five chapters. The first chapter begins with an introduction that explains exactly what focus is, why it is hard to

maintain and a bit about how procrastination can play a big role in your lack of focus.

The second chapter looks at how the right work environment can make a huge difference in how much work you get done, and what you can do to take control of that environment. We finish the first chapter with a quiz that will tell you how much of a problem you have with focusing. With the results, you can self-evaluate exactly where you are and what you can do to improve.

When you feel directionless, it quickly gets overwhelming. And when you feel overwhelmed, you're susceptible to distractions and procrastination. That's why having a plan is the key to feeling in control and in charge. In chapter three, you will read about how you can plan your day to maximize effective work time and minimize distractions.

Taking definitive action in the moment is also essential to getting focused. And sometimes taking a small action, such as turning your phone off for a few hours, can have a big impact on your ability to focus. Chapter four tells you some actions that you can do that will result almost immediately in improved concentration.

Finally, in chapter five, we'll get into all the ways in which improving your health can improve your focus. Simply put, if you're in good physical health and you feel well rested and well fed, you will have more energy. And if you have more energy, you will be able to focus better and do better work.

Throughout this book, you will learn about 25 habits that you can cultivate to improve your focus. These tips are not difficult and are meant to be easily added into your daily routine seamlessly. And again, most of them only take 10 minutes or less to complete!

It doesn't matter whether you are scheduling only five things to do during the day, working tirelessly in bursts during your higher energy times, or even learning how to avoid your email and phone when you first get to the office; you are sure to find some tips to help you maintain your focus and get your work done.

If you are tired of running into issues with your focus, and if you want to be in charge of your own time, be sure to check out this guidebook to get started!

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In order to maximize the value you receive from this book, I highly encourage you to join our tight-knit community on Facebook. Here you will be able to connect and share productivity strategies in order to continue your growth.

It would be great to connect with you there,

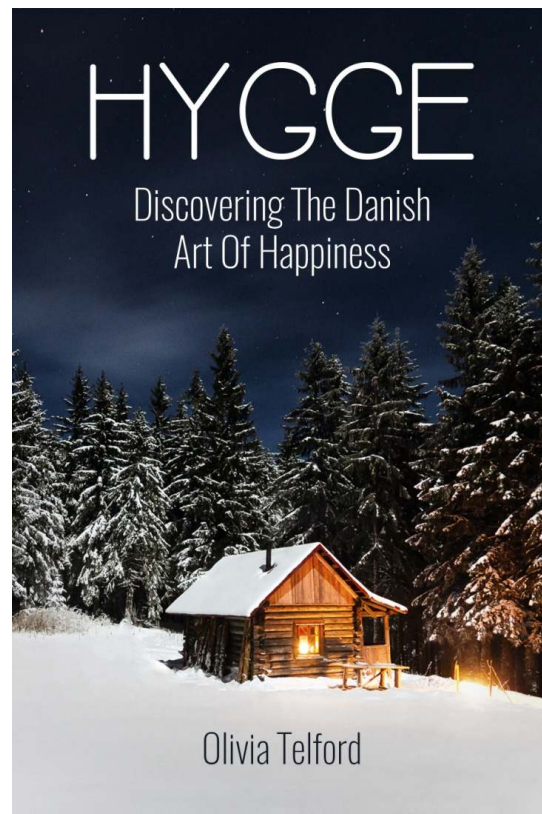
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As a way of saying thanks for downloading this book, I'm offering the book *Hygge: Discovering the Danish Art of Happiness* for FREE to my readers. It was written from a close friend of mine named Olivia Telford, who has kindly allowed me to share it with you.

With Hygge, you'll discover something that offers relaxation, happiness and contentment, all rolled into one. It is a way of being and living that has been adopted by countless numbers of people throughout Scandinavia and the wider world and reflects a 'coziness' that encompasses the positivity and enjoyment that one can get from simple everyday things.



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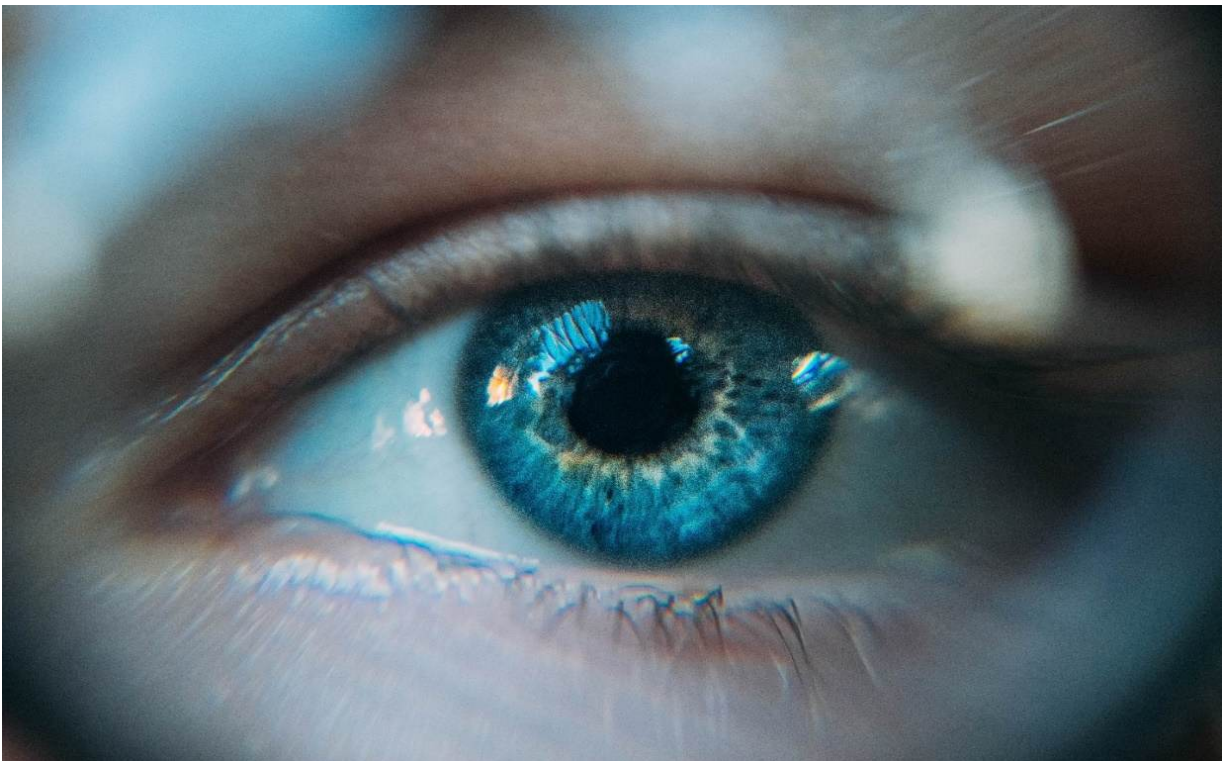
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CHAPTER 1: UNDERSTANDING FOCUS

UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS OF FOCUS

When you think about having focus, you may equate it with having tunnel vision—the belief that you can ignore everything, and just focus on the task that is right in front of you. However, attention management and focus are actually much more complicated than that. In reality, you are managing many different types of attention throughout the day, whether you realize it or not. These types dictate what you notice, do not notice, as well as what you ignore, or focus on. They can also have some different uses and impose different challenges. Taking a closer look at focus will help this make a little more sense.



Voluntary and involuntary attention

Two main types of attention are voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary attention is what you use when you want to consciously, or purposely, focus on something. For instance, if you are in a room while someone else is watching television, and you want to read a book, you may find it difficult to concentrate on what you are reading. You would have to voluntarily pay attention to the book and block out the other noises so that you can focus.

With voluntary attention, you are in control, and you get to decide what captures your attention and what does not. Remember that voluntary attention is like a muscle that needs to be used in order to remain relevant. Unfortunately, most people do not use this skill as often as they should. The good news is that you can strengthen your ability to voluntarily pay attention by using it more. Essentially, you can flex your ability to voluntarily focus, the same way that you can flex a muscle! You will be able to learn how to overcome any distractions and develop a better ability to concentrate on demand, but you are going to have to put in some work to make it happen. It's important to remember that so many goals, including learning how to focus, take time, effort, and energy.

On the other hand, involuntary attention is the exact opposite, meaning you do not have any control over this type. For example, if you hear a gunshot, it is going to grab your attention, no matter how much focus you have. If you are concentrating on something important at work, a blood-curdling scream can still break your concentration. This involuntary attention has a lot of value when your safety is at risk. In fact, it has evolutionary value. Imagine for a second, that your ancestors are hunting for food. They would have been vulnerable to attacks from wild animals and any other aggressive tribes nearby; but involuntary attention was a tool that kept them alert and safe. Essentially, involuntary attention kept them alive.

You are probably not going to be in many situations that threaten your life today. This is because in modern times, we no longer live a hunting-gathering lifestyle or have to kill prey to feed ourselves. However, this involuntary attention is still there and it works hard to draw our attention to any changes in the environment that the body thinks we need to pay attention to. Instead of wild animals, it is going to sound the alarm to things

that are relatively trivial. For example, when your phone vibrates or chirps, it immediately draws your attention so that you can check why the phone reacted that way. Alternatively, you may notice that there is a new email on the tab and you want to go see what it is about right away. It often can become second nature.

Involuntary attention does not have as much use in our lives today since most people are not under a constant threat. However, it can continue to exist in the background, trying to keep you alert. It ends up creating an endless stream of distractions that you will need to learn how to avoid and ignore if you want to get anything else done.

Broad vs. focused attention

There are a few other different types of attention as well. Broad attention allows you to evaluate your circumstances from a “bird’s eye view.” You are going to see the forest, rather than looking at the individual trees, as the famous saying goes. For example, if you are a general in a war and are working on a military strategy, you would use the broad attention idea to map out any types of strikes, envision the supply lines, and forecast how a large group of troops is going to move. The broad attention allows you to see the big picture, and plot accordingly. After you have been able to see this big picture, you would then be able to use the focused attention in order to address the details.

Focused attention, on the other hand, allows you to appraise what happens in a specific situation, and you can come up with the best approach, given your specific goals and the resources that you have around you. In the example above, a challenge that you may face is how to overtake some area in the war, given the strength and number of the adversaries. This is when you would use the focused attention to help resolve the challenge. The good news is that you get to be in complete control! Unlike what you find with involuntary attention, you get to decide how you should wield these tools, which means that you get to use this to your advantage.

Keep in mind that both the focused attention and the broad attention can be good, but they do pose some potential pitfalls. For example, if you only concentrate your efforts on the big picture or the broad attention, it is more likely that important details will fall through the cracks. You have to simultaneously keep both in mind. The same can be an issue going the other way as well. If you zero in on one specific situation, which is focused attention, and exclude the overall big picture, you are going to end up with what is known as “tunnel vision”. This is going to have the effect of impairing your overall awareness of the situation and can lead you to ignoring or being unaware of important factors.

This is just a brief overview of what can happen with attention, and why it is so important to you. There are some types of attention you have no control over, and it can be difficult to ignore them, and not let them take over your day. Some types of attention are going to be voluntary and you

will have control over them, which will be discussed in this guidebook. When you learn more about how to control your attention and avoid the distractions, you are going to see so many amazing results within your own work.

WHY DO I KEEP LOSING FOCUS?

You know what it is like to be sitting at your desk with a lot of work, but for some reason, you just cannot seem to concentrate. You are distracted. Every noise that goes on around you—from the traffic outside to a notification on your phone—has the power today to pull your attention away from your work. Moreover, when you do finish the work, you have a big feeling that the quality has suffered because you were not able to focus.



This is something with which most people are familiar. The work takes twice as long and quality suffers because you are just not able to control the distractions around you. This can lead to self-doubt. It can also be frustrating until you learn how to master your own attention.

In order to help you strengthen the focus that you do have, it is important to learn why you may be losing your focus in the first place. There are usually five factors that contribute to a lack of focus:

- Lack of interest

- Negative emotions
- Poor organization
- Low energy levels
- Lack of control

Let's break each one of these down and take a quick look at them to get a better understanding of why it is so easy to lose focus.

Lack of interest

It is much easier for you to concentrate on a task that interests you. In order to focus, you need to feel engaged in some manner with the task. You need to feel stimulated somehow. When you have an interest in the task, you are more likely to zero in on it, and thus ignore the distractions that go on around you. It is truly remarkable what you can do if you are passionate about your work. Like Confucius said thousands of years ago; “If you love what you do, you will never work a day in your life.”

Negative emotions

When you are in a negative emotional state, your ability to concentrate suffers. If you feel lonely, hostile, depressed, annoyed, or stressed, it can be next to impossible to focus on the important things, at least until you get the feeling under control. Your mind will be so preoccupied with these emotions that you will not have enough cognitive resources available to use to manage your attention.

Poor organization

When you have planned well and organized your day, you will have a better chance at concentrating and ignoring distractions. You will find that it is much easier to manage your attention when your day follows a consistent and familiar pattern. With good organization, you will be better able to keep chaos at bay, and it will do wonders for helping you stay focused, regardless of the task.

Low levels of energy

Another factor that can take away your focus is low energy, something that most people don't consider. You would be surprised at how much energy you need when you have to focus on things for a long time. Your body needs fuel—regular exercise, sufficient sleep, and good food—in order to keep it going.

Do not allow yourself to neglect one or more of these elements because your focus will suffer. Staying up late to get other priorities done, spending too much time on the couch rather than moving around, and not eating healthy foods all have a negative impact on your ability to focus. Your brain needs to have enough energy throughout the day so that it can function the right way and provide you with plenty of focus to get things done. No matter how energized or focused you are, a lack of sleep can truly affect an individual's mental state and potential.

Lack of control

The way that you choose to control your time can also be a big determining factor for how well you can concentrate. If you allow others to interrupt you, you will be unable to achieve the flow state that you need and want in order to work unencumbered by distractions. If people are always distracting you, it is hard to feel immersed in the task.

You must learn how to control your own time if you want a chance to develop razor-sharp focus. It is not always possible to avoid interruptions, nevertheless, there are steps that you can take to avoid unnecessary interruptions so you can get work done. It doesn't matter whether the issues revolve around family members, friends, or a significant other – a lack of control can be draining and be a tremendous obstacle to obtaining real focus.

Is the mind wandering a bad thing?

When you start to lose focus, your mind is going to wander, however, this isn't always a bad thing. The key is learning exactly how to make it work for you and use it to your advantage.

Mind wandering can be nice because it allows the brain some time to be creative. Mind wandering can help you figure out nontraditional solutions to problems that you are having trouble resolving. It can allow you to view things from a different perspective or analyze events or ideas from a more creative perspective. However, this does not mean that you should let your mind wander whenever it wants, because doing so will cut into your performance and productivity.

Make sure that you are focusing on the circumstances that need you to do so. The steps in this guidebook will teach you to do this. There are times—taking a walk or going to the gym—when there is nothing wrong with letting your brain wander a bit. You may even be pleasantly surprised by the things that your mind can come up with when you allow it to wander at the right times.

Now that you know the five biggest factors that can make you lose concentration during the day, it is time to move on and learn some of the common obstacles that you may face when you want to stay focused.

COMMON OBSTACLES THAT TAKE AWAY FOCUS

Many factors are going to impair your ability to stay focused, and you may be more likely to fall prey to one more than the others, but it is possible that each of these could become your enemy at some point. Some of the most common obstacles that you can face when you are trying to stay focused include:

- Mental fatigue
- Restlessness
- Stress
- Interruptions
- Lack of mental clarity
- Unresolved problems
- Poor planning
- Physical clutter
- Social media
- Your phone



Let's take a look at each obstacle and how it interrupts your ability to focus.

Mental fatigue

If your brain is tired, it is difficult to focus, making you more prone to distractions, which makes it difficult for you to zero in on the tasks that you want to get done. Mental exhaustion can come from several factors, but the biggest one is a lack of sleep. Even when you get to bed on time, if you spend the majority of the night tossing and turning, you are going to rob your brain of restful slumber and it will not be prepared for the hard work you give it the next day.

Restlessness

Restlessness is a general feeling of anxiety—something is going on that causes you to feel ill at ease. When you are restless, your brain is getting signals that something is wrong, and it is going to devote some of your cognitive resources to investigating and resolving the issues. However, it is often difficult to figure out the reason that you feel restless, which results in the brain spinning its wheels to resolve something that it can't pinpoint, making it difficult to focus on the important tasks. This is a classic case of spending mental energy in the wrong way.

Stress

A little bit of stress on occasion is actually good for you. It can keep you alert and help you hone your focus. However, if you suffer from chronic stress, you are always in a state of anxiety. Many causes can bring about this persistent stress. Some people feel stressed when they do not have control over their day, when they are close to a deadline that they are not ready for, or after a major life event. The more stress you have in your life, the more it is going to erode at your ability to focus.

Interruptions

Have you started working on something only to have a continuous string of interruptions? This includes emails, phone calls, and coworkers, all of which can be frustrating. Interruptions destroy any momentum you may have, and it takes a long time to get back on track after the distraction is gone. It's extremely easy to get derailed from a very positive and creative train of thought, by being interrupted by a remark, sound, or alert.

Lack of mental clarity

Sometimes your mind is full of trivial ideas and thoughts that may have nothing to do with what you are trying to get done. These thoughts and ideas are called mental clutter and make it impossible for you to concentrate. A mind that is cluttered is one that is unfocused.

Unresolved problems

Having an unresolved problem in your brain is like having a faucet that is leaky, keeping you awake at night. It is there in the background, and it is constantly calling attention to itself. It will not go away, which means that the brain is devoting resources to it, making it difficult to concentrate. It is important to take care of these unresolved problems so that you can get work done.

Poor planning

It is hard for you to stay focused on a project or a task when you do not have a clear and methodical plan to follow. Your brain will do its best to fill in the gaps of poor planning but will ultimately be too distracted to focus on the task at hand.

Think about the last time you went to the store without a list. Your attention was probably drawn to the numerous items on the shelf as you walked down the aisles. The visit that would only take a few minutes if you had come with a list, could take a lot longer, and you are likely to forget something. You might be distracted after seeing something on sale, leading you down a whole new distracting path. Without a plan, your brain is in an unfocused state. Create a plan and work from it, and you will see some great results.

Physical clutter

Do you keep your workspace messy or tidy? Physical clutter in your workspace will impair how well you focus. While some people say that they are still able to concentrate when they are working in an environment that is messy, there are studies that show this is not true.

The *Journal of Neuroscience* published a report in 2011 examining the effect of clutter on focus. This study concluded that working at a desk that is messy will hamper your ability to concentrate on tasks. Learning how to keep your workspace clean and clear can make a big difference.

Social media

Research shows that social media has a short-term effect on how well you are able to concentrate. One study that was done in the journal *Computers in Human Behavior* showed how many students were not able to go more than a few minutes without checking their social media sites. Social media can pose a big distraction, making it impossible to focus on the work you need to get done.

Your phone

Of course, your phone can also be a major distraction as well, even if you are not looking at it. It is going to constantly ring, vibrate, and chirp to let you know about updates on social media, voicemails, and incoming texts. Ignoring the phone is not possible and can prove a major distraction. It is best to keep your phone somewhere else so that you can pay attention when there is work to do. You might be surprised to see how much you can focus when your phone isn't within reach.

WHY IS FOCUS SO IMPORTANT?

You may be surprised to find out that the ability to focus is going to have a big impact on your life. Musicians, artists, and writers stand to produce much more work with more passion if they are focused. There are all sorts of actors and musicians that can admit that a project failed because of their lack of passion during that period in their life when they look back on their careers. Professors and teachers can create better exams, assignments, and lectures to help their students succeed if they have more focus. Parents can come up with better activities that are more creative, fun, and educational for their children if they have more focus.



It is actually our lack of focus, or our inability to focus, that can produce uninspiring results in all the things that we do, but this is not the way it has to be. You can take the steps needed to manage your attention, which will be covered extensively in this guidebook.

Why should you work so hard to increase your own focus? Consider these reasons:

Better productivity

Focus makes it easier for you to stay on task because you are better able to ignore distractions. When you are able to focus, you will be more likely to get into a flow state, which is when your attention is completely absorbed by the task in front of you. You will direct your attention in a more productive way and block out the distracting stimuli that would usually break your concentration and stop your momentum, which results in you getting more done in less time.

Improved relationships

When you are not good at managing your attention, you are more likely to spread yourself too thin, leaving yourself with too little attentional resources, energy, and time to offer to the ones who we value and love. When you get better at controlling your attention, you find that it is easier to be present when you spend your valuable time with loved ones and friends. You can form stronger connections with them, more intimacy and trust, which can make you feel more fulfilled.

Boost your critical thinking

Critical thinking is not something that you may have learned to do in college, and then never needed again. It can greatly benefit you at all points of life. For example, thinking critically while reading a book helps you feel more immersed in the story. If you are going to render a judgment, such as dealing with a fight between your kids, critical thinking will better equip you to do it with reason and fairness. Focus is important for you to think critically. If you are able to master the first one, you are going to improve the latter.

More grit

Experts often claim that intelligence is not a good measurement of success, however, one of the best ways to tell if you will be able to overcome challenges in your life is your grit or resilience. With it, you will likely experience more success in everything you do, but resilience is going to demand some sharp focus. It requires you to zero in on a challenge and devote more cognitive and physical resources to overcome it. You can learn how to direct your attention so that you can handle the challenges that you run into each day and face them with positivity and certainty.

Greater decisiveness

If you are decisive, you have the ability to make good decisions without overanalyzing everything. It lets you evaluate your circumstances, consider the different options, and then choose the one you want with confidence. This is important no matter what you do in your life. Luckily, it is a skill that you can develop. Moreover, attention mastery is an essential ingredient to this. It can allow you to make smarter and better decisions in your life.

If you struggle with indecisiveness, you may find yourself getting stuck when it is time to make a decision because you worry about all of the factors to consider. When you are indecisive, you could spend weeks thinking about a decision or second-guessing the decisions that you do make. With better focus, you pay attention to the details and make decisions with confidence.

Better retention of information that you get

Have you ever had trouble remembering new details such as a new concept, a person's name, or the best route to a destination? This is common because many factors affect your ability to hold onto information, including your levels of stress, the amount of sleep you get, and your levels of energy.

Your ability to focus has the greatest impact of all. Being able to focus allows you to cut through your brain fog, ignore distractions, and concentrate on the details that are important to you or that you want to commit to memory.

All of us have things that we need to remember. You need to be able to remember the information that your boss tells you, the names of the people you meet, and so much more. Human beings have to remember all sorts of data, whether it's e-mail addresses, inspirational quotes, or work deadlines. Moreover, with the help of the right amount of focus, you can make this happen.

Improved levels of confidence

Imagine what it would be like if you were able to master your own attention to the point that you were able to achieve all the other benefits that we discussed in this chapter. How do you think that would affect your self-confidence? It is likely that you are going to feel as if you can accomplish anything that you set your mind to.

Imagine that you get to enjoy more productivity, have the ability to think in a more critical manner, have stronger relationships, are better at making decisions, have improved memory, and can be more resilient, all at the same time. You are going to feel more self-assured when you are ready to start on a new task or a new project, no matter what it is!

WHAT DOES PROCRASTINATION HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

Procrastination is a big issue when it comes to keeping your focus. All of us have had times when we do not want to get work done. The work may be boring. You may think the work is too overwhelming, so why even try to work on it at all? Alternatively, perhaps there is some other reason that you decide to put off work. It might not even be a reason that you can readily identify.



If you receive a project and then decide to procrastinate getting it done, you can guess that your focus is going to be low. You have no interest in even starting, so why would you put your focus towards doing it? That certainly doesn't make any sense, does it? While a bit of procrastination is not the end of the world, it can end up being a big issue if you partake in it all the time.

Human beings have limited self-control. Self-control is like a muscle, in that it can become quickly exhausted, and in some people, this happens much faster than in others. It all depends on the individual's discipline and

habits. When self-control is close to being depleted, you are going to choose to do something that is more pleasurable—other tasks that lead to procrastination—rather than the work that needs to be done.

To make it simple, procrastination is a great avoidance strategy. You decide to look for distractions and avoid focus because you do not want to do the work. You may find it boring or too hard or something else, and so you refuse to give it the focus that it requires. Procrastinators are going to choose to work on something else rather than what needs to be done, simply because it is easier to choose the thing that brings pleasure rather than pain. This might be the easy choice, but not the productive choice.

Learning how to have more focus can help you to avoid procrastination. You can put it at bay, but it is going to be difficult. If you are a procrastinator, you will really find that some of the tips in this book are hard to follow because you are more inclined not to do the work at all, and your focus is probably limited.

Here are some things you can do to help avoid procrastination so that you can gain more focus quickly:

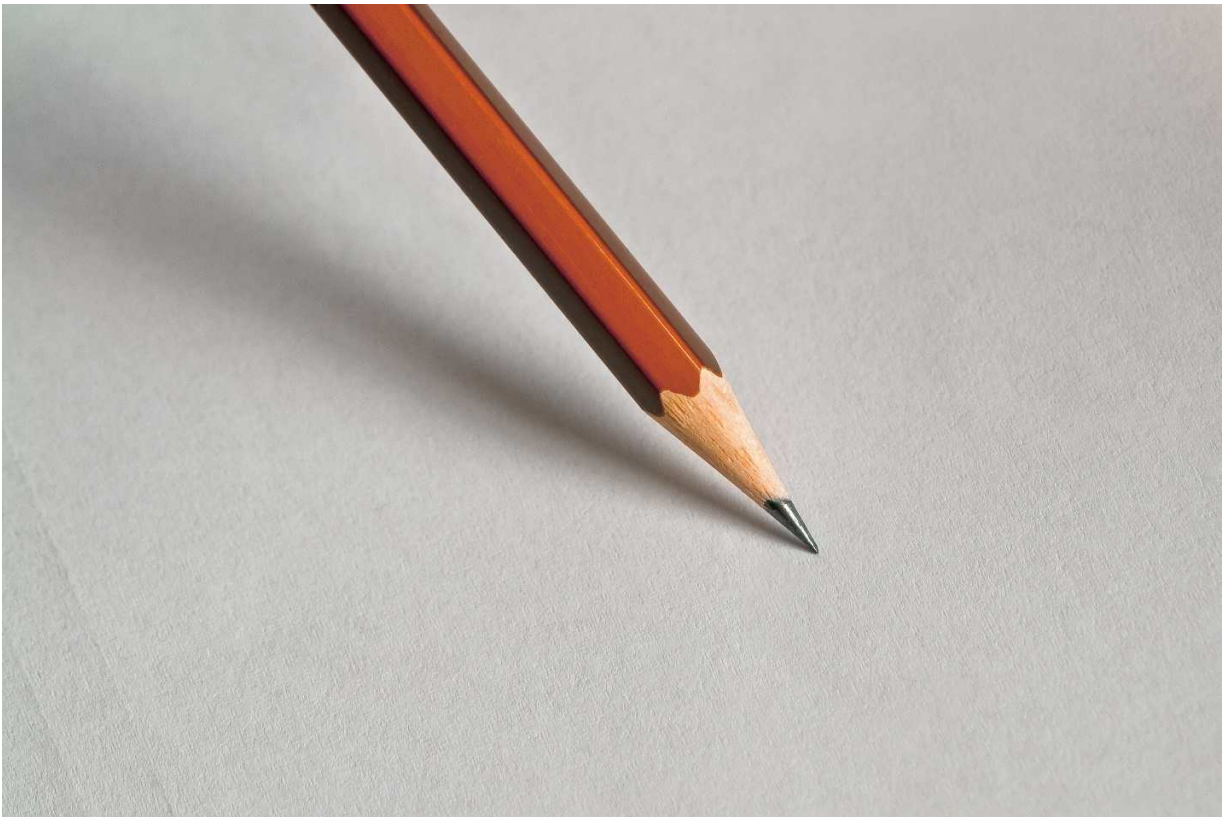
1. Identify your triggers: There are actually different types of procrastinators and knowing which one you are can help you to break the cycle.
 - a. Perfectionists will not get the work done because they know they cannot do it perfectly, or they are always waiting for the perfect approach or timing. Tasks are never done because, to them, things are never perfect enough.
 - b. An ostrich prefers to stay in the dreaming stage. When they do this, they do not have to work for real or deal with any stress, and they feel that the dreaming gives them a sense of achievement because they are envisioning their big plans. Unfortunately, those plans stay dreams and don't really ever accomplish anything.
 - c. Self-saboteurs think that by doing nothing, bad things will not happen. They are worried about making mistakes or doing things wrong, therefore, they choose to do nothing. Of course,

this is ineffective for anyone trying to achieve any meaningful goals.

- d. Daredevils believe that by waiting until they reach a deadline is a way to make them push to do better. They believe that starting early is not important and that it will sacrifice their time for pleasure.
 - e. Chickens do what they feel they should do, rather than thinking through what they should be doing.
2. Face the triggers: Once you figure out which of these is your trigger, you need to face it. Learn how to fight off the type of procrastinator you are and you will see results. Of course, this takes a certain amount of honesty and self-reflection on your part.
 3. Take breaks: Sometimes you need to take a break from your task because the brain is not supposed to work nonstop. Even five minutes can make you feel better and can ensure that you are not worn out or tired. Fatigue can sometimes be a big reason for procrastination, so take those breaks so that you can maintain your focus.
 4. Reward yourself: You may find that rewarding yourself can make your work more fun. If you are someone who procrastinates because you are worried about the fun stuff that you are going to miss, then this is a strategy that might work for you. Set up some rewards that you can look forward to that will keep you moving towards your goals.
 5. Find smart ways to keep track of your time: In order to avoid procrastination, you must find a way to keep track of how you spend your time each day. There are apps, such as Rescue Time, that help you keep track of the way you spend your time. It will give you a breakdown of how you spend your time and can help you find out how often you are actually on task. You can turn it into a fun game to figure out if you need have been slacking during times when you thought you were productive.

POP QUIZ: TEST TO SEE HOW MUCH YOUR FOCUS CAN IMPROVE

You have to learn that every distraction is going to sidetrack you from your work, no matter how harmless it seems. Each one can break you from your concentration and can disrupt your momentum. Moreover, distractions will wreak havoc on your productivity and affect the quality of your work.



Therefore, with this chapter, we are going to look at the extent that you have difficulty concentrating. With each of the 15 statements below, give yourself a score from one to five depending on how true each statement is to you. A score of one means that the statement describes you, and a score of five indicates that it does not at all. When you are done, tally the results to see how big of a problem focus is for you.

1. Thoughts that are irrelevant to the situation will constantly surface when you are working

2. Your workspace is always filled with lots of clutter
3. You forget a lot of things and are absentminded
4. You do not set objectives and goals each day
5. Your mind tends to wander during meetings
6. You get distracted easily
7. You become bored quickly
8. You neglect to plan your day
9. You regularly fail to notice some of the important details
10. You try to work on more than one project or task at the same time
11. If you are working on a task, you become fidgety or restless
12. You are often late to appointments and meetings
13. You have trouble remembering where you put personal items
14. Your days do not follow any kind of routine
15. You find that it is difficult to focus on what people say to you during conversations

Remember that you are giving yourself a score between one and five for each of these statements and when you are done, you can add up your points.

If you scored between 60 and 75, you have a lot of control over your attention, probably more than most people. You can already ignore distractions and you have a good handle on getting into a flow state when you work. Even so, you may still find a few of the tips we talk about in this guidebook helpful. Regardless, you certainly are ahead of many people in terms of focus, already. Congratulations!

If you scored between 45 and 59 points, you are doing pretty well with managing your attention, but doing so consistently will continue to remain a challenge. You will find that reading through this guidebook is really going to help you with your focus. You will reap many benefits by reading through the tips.

If you scored between 30 and 44, you have a consistent problem with staying focused on your work. You have trouble concentrating on your activities, studies, and work and sometimes have trouble keeping track of what people say when you speak to them. You are not able to concentrate

for a long period because you are super susceptible to distractions that are in your immediate environment. You will see a big improvement in your concentration if you start using even a few of the tips in this guidebook.

If you scored less than 30, you need a lot of work in order to see productivity go up for you. Mastering your attention is going to require consistent application of many of the tips that we provide in this guidebook. The good news is that this book has many different tips to try out, and if you are able to combine them, you are going to find that focus can be yours for the taking. It's important to realize, however, that you have your work cut out for you.

After looking at the results, take some time to go through and determine which areas you would like to work on the most. After a few weeks or months of trying some of the tips, you can come back and take this test again to see if you scored a bit higher or not. This is a good way to gauge whether you are seeing results or if certain tips are working for you.

CHAPTER 2: TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR ENVIRONMENT

SETTING UP THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

Before we get into some of the tips that you can use to help you see results with your focus, we need to spend some time talking about your environment. The place where you work in is going to play a big role in determining whether you can concentrate for a long period or not. A supportive environment can help you avoid distractions, enter into your flow state, and focus on your work. The wrong type of environment can make even the most focused person have trouble managing their attention for very long.



Some of the things that you should consider for your environment include:

Lighting

You must make sure that you have the proper amount and type of lighting to help manage your attention. Studies show that young people are better able to keep their concentration steady when they are in an environment that is well lit. This is the same for adults who work in offices. If you are in conditions of low light, it can affect not only your focus but also your productivity and mood. When you have plenty of light in your workspace, you are more mentally engaged and happier, which can make concentration easier.

When you sit down to work, take note of how much light is available. If it does not seem to be enough, try to find a new location to work in or consider changing the amount of light to make it better. You should also try to use natural light when possible because this can help to improve workplace productivity and performance.

Background noise

If you are easy to distract, then you will find that any type of noise in your workspace can prevent you from getting work done. Nearby voices, repetitive tapping, ringing, and clicking, and more can all take your attention away from the task, making it hard for you to get anything done.

For some people, background noise makes it difficult to stay on task. However, you need to ask yourself whether all types of noise have this effect on your concentration, or if there are only certain types. For example, you could easily have issues with other people talking around you, but you are just fine listening to classical music. Your attention may be easily diverted by intermittent sounds from a video game, but not the continuous thrum of an air conditioner in the building. It is important to understand which sounds you are sensitive to, in terms of distraction, and which sounds (the right music, etc.) that can actually help put you in the right flow state.

Some people must have their surroundings completely silent in order to focus, while others do better with some white noise. Still, others work best when they have a buzz of activity around them. Everyone is a bit different, so you may need to experiment to find what kind of noise works best for you.

Comfort

The amount of comfort that you get out of your office is going to affect how much you can concentrate directly. If you feel uncomfortable in your area, whether it is from a physical ailment, the position of your desk, or even your chair, you will find that your focus will go to the feeling of being uncomfortable rather than on doing your work.

If you think that you are not feeling comfortable right now, then a few different things could be detracting from your comfort while you work, including:

- The position of your monitor to your personal line of vision
- How much time you have sat still without taking a break
- Your posture
- How your clothes fit
- How your shoes fit
- The height of the chair and the desk

These factors are going to greatly determine whether you are feeling comfortable at work, so they are important when determining whether you will be able to focus.

The next thing that you can examine is your posture. If you are not sitting up straight, you may be causing unneeded stress on your body, which could eventually lead to injury if severe enough. To evaluate your posture, ask yourself these questions:

- Is the normal curvature of the spine in place when you sit?
- Have you distributed your weight evenly between both hips?
- Are your knees bent at a 90-degree angle?
- Are your feet able to stay planted on the ground flat?
- Can your back touch the back of the chair?
- Is your back straight with the shoulders back rather than slouching?

You can also look at the chair that you are sitting in. If you have to spend the majority of your day in a chair that is not very comfortable, it can be difficult to enjoy your work or to focus at all. Some of the questions that you can ask about your chair include:

- Is there so much padding in the chair that it causes you to feel sleepy?
- Does the chair allow you to adjust the back support, armrests, and other features that your body needs?
- Does it offer you the support you need for proper sitting posture?
- Does it offer breathability while you sit?
- Do you get enough support on the hips and back to make you feel comfortable?
- Does it constantly roll around so that you have to use your feet as well as the core muscles in order to keep your position the same?

You should also take some time to measure the distance between the monitor and your eyes. The ideal amount of space is between 24 and 35 inches. The top of the monitor should be at the same height as your sight line to avoid eye or neck strain.

Sitting still for a long period can cause you to feel uncomfortable, even if you are in a good chair, maintain good posture, and have a workspace that is optimized. You should consider taking frequent breaks and getting up to stretch occasionally or even go on a walk. This could help get your blood pumping, and help keep you alert, since often times, working for long periods of time requires a sedentary state. Doing this can help to relieve some of the tension you feel in the shoulders and neck and it can help you to get back to your work after the break, feeling refreshed and ready to focus.

Temperature

The temperature of the place you are working in can make a big difference, as well. Some people cannot work and focus if they are too warm. It can make them sleepy, which makes it hard to focus. Others find that if it gets too cold, the same thing can happen as well. It seems that the ideal temperature for most people is between 68 to 77 degrees. If you have any control over the temperature in your office while you are working, try to keep the temperature near these numbers.

However, you may not be the one who is in control of the thermostat at your work. If you do not have a say in it and it does not seem to be at a temperature that works for you, there are a few things you can do:

- Dressing in layers protects you if you are in a cold office. If it is too warm on a particular day, then just start removing the layers until you are comfortable.
- Bring a small fan to help you stay cool or a small space heater to keep you warm.
- Have some liquid cold gel packs available. You can place these under your feet when you are warm.
- Iced water can be a great option to keep your internal temperature on track.
- If you are using a desk lamp to help with the lighting, consider going with an LED bulb. The incandescent bulbs create more heat and can make the area much warmer, while the LED will not do this.
- Open a window if you find that the air outside is cooler compared to the air in the office.
- Bring a sweater or a light blanket to the office if you find that the temperature is too low.
- Carry a scarf to put around your neck.

These are just a few of the things that you should consider when it comes to the environment that you are working in. You may also need to pay attention to the presence of others, the air quality, and the scents that are around you. Make sure to experiment a little bit with your work environment and some of these other factors to ensure that you are able to set up your workspace to make it easier for you to focus.

HABIT NO. 1: YOU DO NOT NEED TO BE PERFECT

When it comes to focusing, your mental environment is just as important as your physical environment and, sometimes, the biggest issue with our ability to focus is ourselves. If you are working on a report, responding to an email that will take some time, or writing an article, you could harm your own progress if you always have to stop to research details, validate data, cite sources, or edit what has been written. Each time that you stop, you disrupt your workflow. Each one interrupts you and can take away that focus.



This is a common problem for perfectionists, who are not able to proceed with their tasks unless they feel that their work is of the highest quality and absolutely perfect. While it is nice to hold yourself to high standards, and you should never hand in unsatisfactory work; this can be a problem for some people who cannot seem to focus. Perfectionism is going to prevent you from ever being able to master your attention and actually getting things done during the day.

Learning how to tame your inner perfectionist will help you focus on the task, and you will be able to do work for longer periods. If you find that your perfectionism is regularly making you stop to interrupt yourself, these tips may help you prevent this:

- Work in ten-minute time chunks. During this time, do not make edits or correct any mistakes, even if there is something that is glaringly wrong with your project. Doing this will help train your mind to work without interruptions. A word of warning though—this is going to be difficult at first. Your inner perfectionist is going to protest, but it becomes easier over time.
- If you end up needing to look up something that you can't remember, just fill it in with "XYZ" in the project. Do not stop during those ten minutes to look up the information that you need. Keep on working. This allows your workflow to continue smoothly and seamlessly. You can always go back and fill in the blanks later on if you need too.
- After the ten minutes are up, you can stop and review your work. You can then fix the mistakes and add in the details that you skipped over earlier. This allows you to hand in good work, but you will train yourself not to fix every little thing every few minutes.

It will not take long to learn that this approach is more efficient than always interrupting yourself to check your work. It will streamline your workflow, which makes it easier for you to get into the zone and get more done. Consequently, you will also find that this simple process can make it easier to focus while you also ignore major distractions.

Your inner perfectionist has good intentions and wants you to provide the highest-quality work possible. The problem here is that it is going to become somewhat obsessive over this goal, and it will always encourage you to interrupt your workflow repeatedly. Moreover, this can keep you away from gaining any of the momentum that you actually need to get your work done.

If you are able to tame your inner perfectionist, you will improve your ability to concentrate. You will get more done, turn in great quality work, and get it all done in less time than before.

HABIT NO. 2: LEARN WHAT YOUR TRIGGERS ARE

A common assumption is that you become distracted because you are bored. With nothing there to engage your mind properly, the attention is drawn towards something else that promises to do this, even if it will only succeed for a moment.



The truth of the matter is that distractions are going to be triggered. It could be external or internal stimuli are going to break into our concentration and will pull us off the task we are working on. If you are tired of fighting with these distractions, it is so important to identify what triggers them to start with.

We are going to first address some of the internal triggers that are likely responsible for disrupting your focus. Some of these are going to be psychological in nature and others are going to be more physical in nature:

- Moodiness
- Pain, such as a backache or a headache
- Frustration

- Restlessness or boredom
- A tendency to procrastinate
- Food cravings

These stimuli can make you more susceptible to distraction. For example, if you are having a craving for a candy bar, it may be more difficult to concentrate on the task. If you procrastinate on a regular basis, the brain may be trained to find different ways to divert your attention to other places. Depression, pain, frustration, and boredom can also erode away at your attention if you let them.

If you are looking to keep these distractions at bay, you need to address them. You must come up with a strategy and then implement it to help suppress or avoid them. For example, if you get headaches when you eat sugary foods, it may be a good idea to avoid sugar before you get started on work. Know what your triggers are and how to avoid them, and you will have a better chance of staying focused.

There are also some external stimuli that can make you more susceptible to distraction. Some of the external stimuli to watch out for include:

- Noisy co-workers
- The internet
- Television news programs
- Television
- Social media
- Phone calls
- Texts
- Emails

All of us have had these affect us at some time or another. We may say that we will just check out emails one time, and then an hour later we are still on them. The same is true when we start searching things online or looking at social media. If you keep your phone near you, it can be tempting to check it all the time to see if someone has texted you and to answer any texts that come in. All of these are going to make it more difficult for you to keep your focus on the work that you need to get done.

This is why it is so important to start realizing the reasons that you are distracted. It is only by being able to identify your personal external triggers that you can come up with a good strategy that will help you to avoid these triggers.

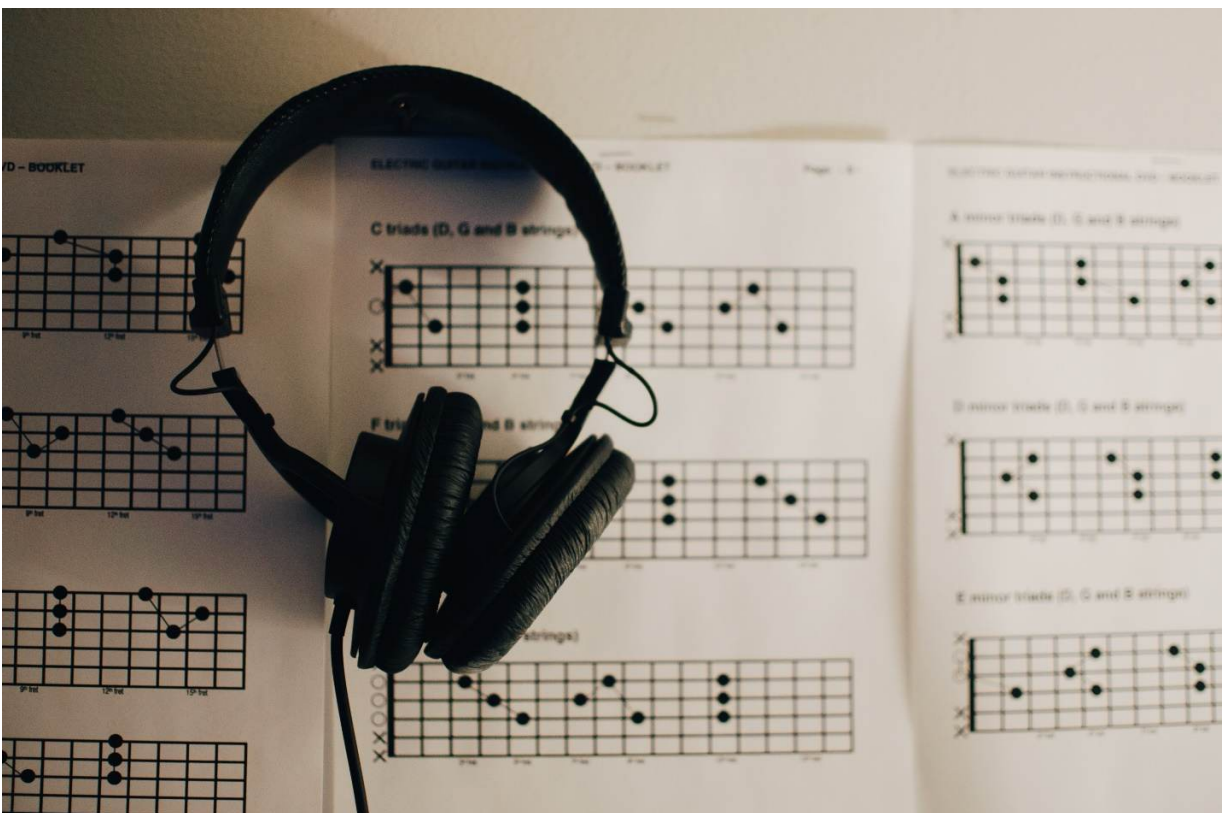
If your trigger is the phone, turn it off and put it across the room or even in another room if possible, until you are done with your work. If your trigger is social media or the internet, turn off your Wi-Fi and get the work done before you are allowed to look at either. If your trigger is email, but you still need to check it a few times a day for work, pick two or three times during the day to check. Outside of these times, and while you are working, you are not allowed to look at your email, no matter what the reason is.

Each person is going to have a different external trigger, and the one (or more than one, for some people) that bothers you is going to determine the strategy that you will need to come up with. You can turn off the television, keep your phone far away, and stay offline to help you avoid these triggers and to keep you on track. Of course, this also ultimately requires discipline on your part.

It is important to learn how to identify your personal triggers for distraction, both the internal and the external triggers, and then learn how to address them properly. When you are able to keep those triggers to a minimum, you can master your attention and focus better, and it is easier to keep your focus on the task.

HABIT NO. 3: MUSIC CAN HELP YOU TO GET INTO THE FLOW

Music serves two purposes for those who are trying to concentrate on their work—it helps to drown out the noises around you and helps you to enter a flow state to get more done. Noise can sometimes make it difficult to keep your attention on a task, but when you are able to control the noise—playing music, for instance—you will be able to focus better.



If you work in an office setting, a simple noise like your coworkers talking can distract you. In a coffee shop, the making of lattes and cappuccinos can distract you. At home, your kids watching television or playing can take away your attention. Music can drown out some of the noise, or at least push it enough into the background so that it no longer is a distraction.

For some people, even the silence around them can be too distracting because they are used to the noise. If this is you, music can replace the

silence and make it easier for you to concentrate.

Music has the power to help you get into a state of mind of sharper focus so that everything around you becomes part of the background. Musicians, athletes, and gamers call this “being in the zone,” and it can benefit you in the same way.

The key here is the type of music that you listen to. Most people find that the best type of music to help them with this process is instrumental music. Music with lyrics can be a distraction. You may be able to listen to songs with lyrics if you are familiar enough with the song that the lyrics will not bother you. There are certain people that might have their attention taken away, once they actually start listening to the lyrics and attempting to decipher the song. You may need to experiment to find what works the best for you.

Classical music is the best instrumental music for concentration because the tones will keep you “in the zone” for as long as you need and, musically speaking, it does not have a lot of distractions. Although classical music does not work for everyone, most people find that it gives them the ability to focus right away, so it’s worth trying.

When choosing classical music, there are many options. You can choose one song that you really like and just put it on a loop while you’re working, or you can choose an album with a variety of songs to play while you work. There are also many classical music options on YouTube and other places online. Just try what works and go from there. You might find out that you enjoy it more than you thought you would!

HABIT NO. 4: DISCONNECTING CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

If you are like most workers who complain about focus, you will find that the internet and your phone are the two distractions that threaten your focus the most. Together, if you let them, they can make it impossible for you to stay on track and get things done.



Your phone can be a problem because it gives you instant and continuous access to social media, emails, and texts. Each message produces an audible alert, and even if you turn the phone's volume down, it sends a light that you will see when something new comes in. These alerts can be big distractions, and they will disrupt your concentration, even if you can somehow manage to ignore the phone after the sound goes off.

The internet can be an even worse problem. One search on Google can end up leading you down a rabbit hole that could take up hours of your time. Add in social media, internet research, and emailing, your attention span is quickly deteriorating. This can affect even those who truly planned on working, as there is an endless amount of content out there.

The solution to this problem is to disconnect while you are working. You can turn off your phone completely and leave it in another part of the room. If you are able, turn off the Wi-Fi as well. This helps eliminate the potential for distractions right from the beginning.

When you are on a break or are done with your work for the day, then it is fine to grab the phone and reconnect again. You can then read and respond to any missed texts that are important, spend some time on Facebook, or check your email. However, once the break is over, these things need to be turned off.

If you are working and find that you need to be online to look up something related to your task, do not be tempted to go online immediately. Make a note of it and then keep working. You can research the item at a later time, rather than letting it slow you down.

This will not always be easy, as you will want to reach for your phone and check to see if anyone texted you. Leaving your phone across the room will help you avoid temptation. You may want to get online and check social media or check to see if someone sent you an important email. Avoid the temptation as much as possible. You will be amazed at how much more you can get done during the day without it.

You will find that when you take the time to disconnect, you are going to feel less stress, more relaxation, and you will be better able to concentrate. You will not be a victim of distractions as much, and you will be able to catch up on all those social media updates, texts, and emails when you are caught up in your work.

When you disconnect your internet and phone, you are allowing your brain a chance to focus on things that matter. Your work needs to be done first. You can always come back to the phone and the internet later. It's important

to remember that they are not “going anywhere”. However, you have to disconnect from them and make a promise to yourself that you will not pay attention to them while you finish the work.

CHAPTER 3: PLANNING TO BEAT PROCRASTINATION

HABIT NO. 5: CREATE A DAILY ROUTINE THAT WORKS FOR YOU

Some people are determined to be spontaneous. They think that they can do whatever they want, whenever they want, and that's the way they like it. However, most people thrive on routine. Your brain prefers structure—it likes to know what is coming next. Your brain needs to be able to focus on what's coming next, rather than be distracted by the endless possibilities that you may do next.



You will find that productive people follow a daily routine because it helps them get things done. They are more able to devote their cognitive

resources to tasks that actually require their attention, which allows them to work in a manner that is more efficient.

When you are productive, you do not need to worry about whether there is any motivation to act. Nor do you need to worry about whether you have the right amount of willpower. Your routine will prompt you to take the next action that needs to be done.

Think about the daily patterns that you have. You follow them even if you have not realized it yet. For most people, these patterns are going to be executed in short periods. Because of this, most people are going to miss the increased focus that longer, more comprehensive routines offer.

For example, you probably have a morning ritual that you follow when you first wake up in the morning that includes something like the following:

- Brush your teeth
- Go to the bathroom
- Take a shower
- Blow dry your hair
- Put on deodorant
- Apply makeup if you are a lady
- Get dressed
- Eat breakfast

You probably do this on a daily basis, without even noticing it. As you execute this series of actions, you just go through it without thinking about what you need to do next. You have been through this same routine for years by now. Each action, along with the overall order, is now a part of your routine, which has been ingrained and embedded in your mind. Because of this, you are able to complete the whole routine efficiently without ever being distracted from it and you focus, subconsciously, on each action. It's pretty obvious that all of us are able to think about something else while brushing our teeth or taking a shower.

You can use this same kind of attentional quirk to help you stay focused when you are trying to get things done at work. Simply creating a daily routine that will help you take action on recurring tasks can be a great help.

For example, suppose that you must get each of the following done during the day:

- Checking your email
- Returning all phone calls
- Creating three daily reports for your boss
- Meeting with your coworkers to go over a project.

Simply create a routine that works the best for your needs, and when you create this new routine, consider adding in some chunking to it. This can make it easier for you to know what needs to be done and when you are going to take breaks. This makes completing these tasks and taking breaks easier when they are at the same time each day.

Over time, and with enough repetition, this pattern will become deeply rooted in your consciousness. Your brain will learn what to expect and what is going to come next. As a result, it will be much easier for you to manage your own attention. You will be less prone to distraction, and it is easier than ever for you to stay on task for the things that are the most important.

HABIT NO. 6: CAPTURE YOUR IDEAS QUICKLY

One of the biggest things that will distract you during the day is the unexpressed ideas and thoughts that go through your mind. They are just going to float around in your head, getting in the way of your focus because they want some attention to. You may want to remember them for later, but it may take some time before you can give them attention. Moreover, holding them there will just impede the focus that you are working so hard on.



For example, you may be hard at work on a project, and then a promising idea pops into your head. You try to ignore it so that you can keep working and stay on task. Nevertheless, the idea continues to hang in there, and it is hard to keep your mind on the current task.

It is healthy to have these ideas. Creativity is a great thing no matter what industry you are working in. The problem is that these random ideas, if they are not taken care of, can really destroy your focus and makes it hard to

keep yourself productive. The challenge is that you do not want to forget those ideas, even though you do not want to let them break your concentration and momentum. However, how are you supposed to address these ideas in a way that still lets you maintain your focus?

The best option to try out is to record those thoughts right away. This allows you to store them to review later without having it pull you away from the work for more than a few seconds. It allows you to document this creativity, while not derailing you from your current work. When you are ready to record your ideas to help you stay on task and focused, you can use one of the following tools:

- Whiteboard
- Google Keep
- Todoist
- OneNote
- Evernote
- Pen and paper
- Digital voice recorder
- Chalkboard

When a random, but promising, thought comes into your mind, you can write it down, dictate it into your recorder, or store it somewhere online using one of the programs listed above. Do not let that thought just float around in your head. Once you document it, it becomes so much easier to let it go and move on with the work at hand.

According to the creator of the Getting Things Done system, David Allen, these errant thoughts are open loops. They are intentions that you have not had time to categorize yet. They are going to represent the things that we need or want to do. If you leave them open, they will keep on nagging you and will pull at your attention. Of course, this will affect your overall productivity if not managed properly.

To be successful with your focus, you need to close these loops. Storing them in another location to look at later is a great option. Otherwise, leaving those thoughts there will just tax your memory, distract you, and can make you more inclined to procrastinate. You can choose the method that works

the best for you, just make sure that you have a system in place to store those thoughts so that you can remember them for later, without letting them ruin your concentration.

HABIT NO. 7: MAKE A TO-DO LIST EACH DAY

A to-do list can be a great way to keep you on task during the day. It will help you record all the tasks, projects, and items that you need to address at some point, whether it is today or on another day. It will help you get those tasks out of your head, where they can pose as the problematic open loops, and onto paper that you can review when needed. When you get these tasks written down, you can focus and zero in on the task that you need to get done first.



This effect is related to the Zeigarnik effect, which asserts that the unfinished tasks that are in our heads will draw more attention compared to the finished tasks. This is because the former are open loops. When these tasks stay in our heads, they are going to pose intrusive thoughts that can distract you and will make it almost impossible to concentrate.

This is where a to-do list can come in handy because it will resolve the problem. When you stop to record all of your tasks and thoughts, you can purge them out of your short-term memory and keep them from becoming open loops. When you put them on a list, you can close up the loops, allowing your mind to concentrate without worrying that you will forget to

work on something later. In addition, they can help with attention management because they will remind you later about what you need to get done.

For example, let us say that you just started a project that has many individual actions. If you write out these actions on a list, you do not have the added worry of forgetting any of them. You just keep the list with you and work down it, crossing items off once they are complete. This keeps the process simple and can make it easier to keep on task. Moreover, you don't have to worry about forgetting your objectives or ideas when you write them down.

Once you are able to remove these items from your mind, you can stop worrying about them. You know that all of the tasks are written down and you can look them over whenever it works out for you. With less stress and a reminder from the to-do list, you will get it all done without all of the worries from before.

There are several different mediums that you can use to help make a to-do list. The medium is not that important, as long as you make sure that you record the items or projects that need to be done to help you keep focus. The basic options for you to choose from to help you focus include:

- Dry erase board
- Cloud-based tools
- Paper and pen

For many people, keeping with the simplicity of working with pen and paper is usually the best. You can write everything out, take notes, cross things off, and easily take your to-do list wherever you need to go for work.

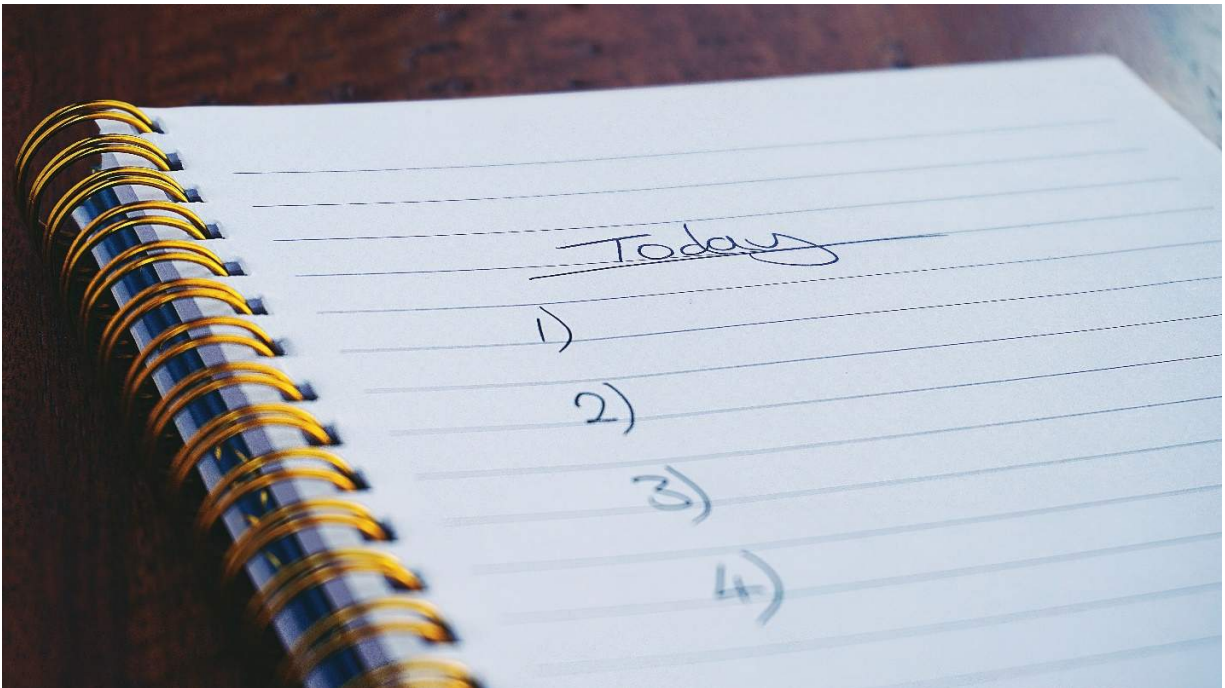
Like what's been discussed in Chapter 9, you might want to limit yourself to working to five important tasks. Listing five high-priority tasks on your to-do list will help you better focus and be more productive. Not just that, but having a smaller to-do list will also make you feel more relaxed throughout the day. On the other hand, filling your plate with too many tasks will just rather make you feel pestered, pressured, and distracted. Your

goal is not to finish as many tasks as possible, but to improve the quality of your work even if that means working on a smaller to-do list.

Organizing your tasks with a to-do list and keeping it short and concise — prioritizing the five most important tasks for the day — will help you to have better time and focus management. Not only will you simply complete a task, but you finish it with finesse and quality.

HABIT NO. 8: LIMIT THE TASKS YOU NEED TO GET DONE EACH DAY TO JUST FIVE

The more stuff that you put on your plate, the less likely you will be able to focus on just one task at a time. As you are working on that task, all the other ones are going to demand your attention and will make it hard to keep your focus on one thing. Moreover, if your list gets too long, the stress will start to creep in and erode your concentration even more, making it almost impossible to get stuff done. The work will feel overwhelming at that point.



The best thing to do is look at your daily list of things to do and limit it to just five. Five is enough that you can still get quite a bit done during the day, but few enough that you can just focus on one at a time without worrying about whether you will forget something. If you have a smaller list, you know that there will be enough time to complete all the tasks on the list. You can also avoid the feeling of being pestered by all the other things that still need your attention.

It is easy to overestimate how much you are able to get done during a day. You may want to get it all done, and then you make long to-do lists with too many tasks. Juggling these tasks can cause you a ton of stress, making you feel like you are playing catch up all the time. It will not take long for you to realize that you will never be able to get all those tasks done in the allotted time, which will leave you frustrated. And of course, it will take your focus away.

When you learn how to limit yourself to five tasks in a day, you can effectively avoid this issue. You will have a better handle on everything that is on the list. You will know exactly what needs to be done during the day, and since the list is smaller, you can have the confidence to know that each task will be done on time. It's a number that is significant, without being too cumbersome.

What is the result of all this? A smaller to-do list means that you can feel more relaxed during the day, have more creativity, and be better able to concentrate on what you are doing right now. In addition, the quality of your work will greatly improve.

It is easy to feel that we need to take on everything in our modern world. We want to be there for everyone and get all the tasks done as quickly as possible. We live in a world of constant distraction, stimulation, and sensation. However, taking on too much can cause stress, and makes it difficult to get things done.

It is fine to take some of the pressure off yourself, which will help you get ahead in life simply because you can take the stress off and focus better. Each day, review what is on your to-do list and figure out which tasks are not essential or at least can wait until later. You may decide that they are not necessary at all and cross them off completely or reschedule them for another date that works better with your schedule. The only things that should be left on your to-do list are five important items that you must get done, or want to get done, during that day.

If you do happen to get through those five items, and there is still a decent amount of time left in your day, you can consider addressing the others. It is a bonus if you have time to work on the other things, but it is not a

requirement for you to feel accomplished. The key to this exercise is to remove all the extraneous items from the main list so that you can zero in on the items that are the most important. You will quickly see how this can help your concentration.

HABIT NO. 9: SCHEDULE OUT YOUR DAY INTO TIME CHUNKS

Some may call it the Pomodoro Technique and others will call it blocking. Still, others call it chunking. No matter what name you give to it, there are two basic steps to making it work for your focus:

- Choose a specific amount of time to work on a specific task.
- Spend that time only working on that task.

The amount of time that you allot for each task can vary. Sometimes it may be as short as ten minutes, and other times it could be five hours or more, depending on the task, or tasks, that you are trying to accomplish.



There are three main advantages to dividing your day into chunks:

- It makes you more productive: By allotting a scheduled amount of time for a task, you can set a deadline for it. When you set a deadline, you are effectively shortening the amount of time you will work on that task.

- It can make you more relaxed: You do not need to feel stressed out about whether you have enough time to complete your to-do list. Your schedule will have many time chunks that are meant to help you get your to-do items done. This can eliminate the mystery of what will happen during your day.
- It can sharpen your focus: The chunk that you allot for specific items ensures that you are going to stay on task. You know right from the start that your attention will be only on the task that you have in front of you. You will avoid the temptation to work on other things, so your focus can be on point.

The next question is how to arrange your day into time chunks. First, you should have some idea of how much time is needed to complete your tasks so you can make sure you assign enough time to each of your tasks. It's also important to be realistic and accurate when it comes to these time chunks, as well.

Then, once you have assigned time chunks for all of your tasks, you need to put them on your calendar. This helps to block off time and see your schedule visually, effectively reducing issues with double-booking your schedule. Any calendar will work; just pick one that you like the best.

Finally, you need to schedule breaks within the time chunks, if necessary. For instance, if you set up a time chunk that is longer than 45 minutes, you need to include at least one break, or if the time chunk is more than 90 minutes, schedule several breaks. This is important when you are working on presentations or projects that are going to take you a little more time. This ensures that you get up, move a bit, and give your brain a rest so it can maintain focus. Here are some examples of how you might schedule your breaks using this system:

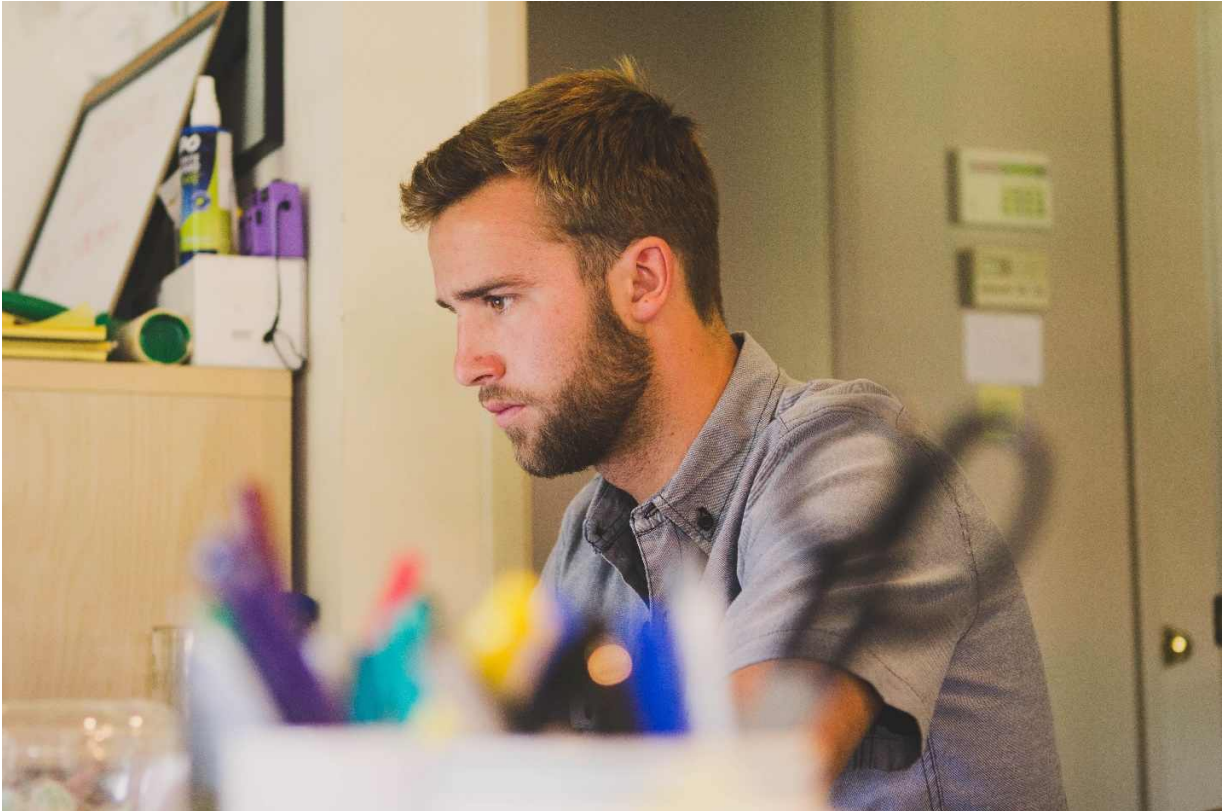
- Work for 45 minutes
- Take a 10-minute break
- Work for another 45 minutes
- Take a 15-minute break
- Work for 45 minutes
- Take a 20-minute break

Take notice of how the length of the break increases after each of your work sessions. This is because staying focused for a full 45 minutes can be hard on the brain. It can tax you mentally. To help you stay fresh so you can keep getting work done, you must make sure that your brain has plenty of time to relax, which is even more important if the work at hand requires deep concentration.

By the time you get through the third and longest break, you can still get back to your work and feel refreshed, even though you have been working on the project for a few hours at this point.

HABIT NO. 10: LEARN HOW TO SINGLE-TASK

In our busy world, most people seem to be impressed by those who are able to multitask. The ability to manage several different tasks at the same time can seem remarkable. Society values and praises it, so most of us want to be multitaskers. We think that multitasking is the key to getting things done.



However, the sad reality about multitasking is it just does not work. Researchers have found that trying to do too many tasks at once actually makes us more prone to distraction, which, in turn, impairs our ability to perform the task. A leading neuroscientist at MIT, Earl Miller, elaborates, “Switching from task to task, you think you’re actually paying attention to everything around you at the same time. But you’re actually not.”

Our brains are not actually able to attend to more than one task at a time, even if we think that it can. Rather, our brains attend to one task, and then another, and then another. When you try to attend to more than one task at a

time, your brain is simply moving back and forth between them. This is not multitasking, it is task switching.

Task switching can cause all sorts of issues when it comes to your focus. First, it is going to require that several tasks remain unfinished at the same time. Remember that those unfinished tasks are open loops that can distract your focus. Second, your quality of work is going to be diminished and your error rate will increase with the number of tasks that you are juggling, which will have a negative effect on your productivity.

Think about it for a moment. Do you have a friend or family member who is considered a habitual multitasker? Have you ever tried to talk to that person and get information out of them when they were trying to get all those tasks done? It is most likely that you found that to be a frustrating experience. The individual was probably having a hard time focusing on what you were saying or what they should say back, so they could not really contribute anything meaningful to the conversation. This is a result of task switching and how it can cripple your concentration.

The best way to help improve your focus is to learn how to single-task—only put your attention on one task at a time. Even though it may be difficult at times; try to resist the temptation to multitask.

If you are someone who is a habitual multi-tasker, this is going to take some time to accomplish. You are used to trying to get as much done as possible at the same time. However, look at how it is affecting your workflow. Are you easily distracted and missing things because you are handling too much at once? Is your productivity slipping and are you getting in trouble at work? Are there now more errors in your work than before?

These are all the effects of multi-tasking, and the issue just gets worse the more things you are trying to get done at once, and the more complex they are. Write down your list of things that need to be done during the day and then pick just one to concentrate on. The others will still be there when you are done. Moreover, if you just work on one thing at a time, you can get it done faster and then move on to the next task on your list.

HABIT NO. 11: BATCH PROCESS SIMILAR TASKS

For this tip, we are going to look at batch processing, a concept familiar to those who work on computers. A computer executes a series of jobs or programs without needing to have a manual intervention for each one. The programs and jobs are queued during the day to be executed at a particular time.



In the context of a computer, the advantage of batch processing is that it puts less of a load on the processor and cores of the computer, and it does not require someone to be there to complete each individual job. No one has to be sitting at the computer to make sure that the job gets done because the computer is set up to just do it all on its own.

You will find that your brain works in a similar way. If you are able to learn how to leverage this attentional attribute, you will experience increased productivity and focus. Let's look at how you can use this batch processing to your advantage.

First, decide everything you need to accomplish in your day and write them down so that you can see them all laid out in front of you. Next, review your list to determine whether there are similar tasks. Then, group the similar tasks together. Some examples include:

- Emails to read and respond to
- Chores to get done
- Reports to complete
- Meetings and appointments to schedule
- Phone calls to make
- Bills to pay
- Blog posts to write

After you have grouped your tasks, you need to schedule time, such as 20 minutes, on your daily calendar, for each group. This is the time when you will focus on just the specific items that fit into the group you scheduled for that time. When you do this, you are prompting your brain to batch process the tasks. There is an advantage to this because the tasks are similar and addressing them together will require fewer resources from the brain. The brain does not need to be prompted to perform each one because it gets into a rhythm and can do each one automatically.

Let us say that your first block of time is to pay bills. This is something that you do each month for years on end, and because of this, your brain is very familiar with how the process works, so it can go through a series of “jobs” to complete the batch. When you look at a bill, your brain will know to look at how much is owed, write a check, and then record the details.

Your brain is able to do all of these without having to put in many attentional resources. It will execute each part repeatedly until all of the jobs in that batch are done. In addition, you can do it quickly since the brain will not have to spend a ton of time thinking about it.

Batch processing can help you sidestep any types of costs that could come up when you task switch. Imagine what it would be like if you paid one bill, and then you moved over to working on a report for ten minutes, and then you made a phone call. After the phone call was done, you sent out an

email, read through a memo, scheduled a meeting, and cleared off your desk a bit before paying yet another bill.

This all seems a little random and all over the place, but it is something that most people end up doing with their day. Known as transaction processing, this results in every task requiring your full attention. It is not very efficient and can leave you feeling very frustrated because you are unable to focus.

Transaction processing imposes large amounts of task-switching costs on your focus and attention. It ends up taking a lot more time because you are switching from one type of task to another instead of working on one type of task at a time. It also makes it difficult to concentrate on the task. Moreover, with transaction processing, you will find that distractions abound.

The batch processing that we discussed will be beneficial in helping you focus. You will stay sharp mentally for a long period. It can help you to maintain the focus you need to get the job done on time, fight distractions, and even stay on task better than ever before.

One thing to keep in mind is that batch processing is most effective when you are working on tasks that do not require much critical or creative thinking. It's important to remember that it works best within this specific context. Therefore, something like doing household chores, paying bills, scheduling an appointment or meeting, or answering emails, will fit into this category. If you are doing a lot of deep research, creating an elaborate system for something, or working on some complex math problems, you are going to need a lot more cognitive resources, and batching will not work well.

However, for those simple things that you need to get done in your to-do list for the day, batch processing can be a great tool. It can help you stay on task and will ensure that you can get things done as efficiently as possible.

HABIT NO. 12: DON'T WASTE YOUR DAY IN MEETINGS

If you work in corporate America, you probably sigh or cringe when you hear about meetings. It is often a waste of time for most workers, as they have to sit and listen to others talk, often about things that are not relevant. Moreover, any time that a meeting is on your schedule, it means that you have a block of time, usually an hour or more, that is lost, and you won't be able to use it to get stuff done.



Although some meetings are important and can help you get more done, because you meet together with others who are working on the same project as you, these meetings take a lot of time out of your schedule. Most of them last for over an hour, which is a lot of valuable time that you could be using elsewhere.

Often, there is no reason for a meeting to last that long. For the most part, meetings last too long because many of the attendees would rather sit in a meeting than get their work done. Sometimes, there is food provided, which is not going to help hurry things along.

Over time, this ends up wasting a lot of time. A better option is to try to avoid meetings as much as possible. When someone wants to discuss something, and they want to schedule a meeting to do so, counter by suggesting that you both discuss the matter right then and there.

In most cases, the topic that the other person wanted to discuss did not really need an hour, and it often did not even need half an hour. It could usually be covered in ten minutes, and sometimes, in less than five minutes. However, if you had scheduled that meeting to discuss the topic, you could have wasted a whole hour of your day.

Clearing your schedule of all those meetings will produce many benefits. First, you will be able to use that time to get more work done, especially work that needs a lot of deep thought and concentration. Without having to interrupt your work to attend a meeting that was not necessary, you could get into a flow state much easier. This allows you to focus on whatever task is in front of you and build up momentum to get it done.

Think about your typical day. How much of it is spent in meetings that do not really get anywhere—meetings that probably could have been handled in a five-minute email? Do you often wish that you could reclaim that time for something that was more productive? Are you tired of getting into a workflow and then having to set it aside, cutting off your concentration, just to go to a meeting that doesn't really hold any value to you?

If this sounds like how you spend the majority of your day, there are a few things that you can do to change it.

- When someone suggests a meeting, presumably for an hour or more, suggest that the two of you have an impromptu meeting right then. Often the meeting is only going to take a few minutes, and you can still solve the problem without having to waste all of your time.

- If you end up having to go to a meeting, try to suggest that it is done while you are standing. This can hurry things along because people are not as comfortable with standing as they are sitting, so they will finish things faster and leave the room.
- If possible, try not to go to a meeting where food is present. Businesses try to reward people for showing up to meetings, but it wastes more of your time. Food is going to lead to comfort, which quells the incentive of the people there to hurry up. It often leads to people staying longer than they should.
- If you are the one who has to take on the responsibility of scheduling a meeting, try to allocate a small window of time to get it done. For example, rather than scheduling the meeting to take an hour, only schedule it for 15 minutes. It is likely you can get all of the information out there in that amount of time. Moreover, the fact that you did not waste your time or the time of anyone else is an added bonus.
- Avoid going to meetings that include more than 10 people because they are going to be long and are often going to be about topics that do not even pertain to you.
- Ask that the meetings stay on the stated agenda. A lot of time can be eaten up by individuals who try to move off topic, and this does not carry any value to you at all.
- See if it is possible for all meetings to be scheduled for after lunchtime. Schedule all necessary meetings in the afternoon, when your focus may be waning a bit anyway.

When you are able to spend less time in meetings, you can spend more of your time on the tasks and projects that you need to get done. The bigger advantage, though, is that it allows you to be free to work in a state that is more focused. You will not have to disrupt your own workflow arbitrarily in order to attend meetings that do not hold much value for you, which wastes your time and slows down your own productivity.

The result of this is that you will be much better at managing your attention and fighting off distractions. So, work hard to avoid those meetings,

especially the ones that are going to be long and hold no value for you, and spend your time actually getting stuff done.

CHAPTER 4: ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE RIGHT NOW TO IMPROVE YOUR FOCUS

HABIT NO. 13: DECLUTTER YOUR WORKSPACE

Clutter is going to have a big influence on the way that you are able to work. If you are disorganized at the office, you will find that it will compete for your attention and can make it difficult to work. Clutter seems to call for you to do something with it, and you may run into the issue of never being able to find the things you need to get work done, ruining your workflow. Learning how to declutter your workspace can make a big difference in how well you concentrate. Some of the tips you can use include:

- **Start from the beginning:** It is likely that you have tried to declutter in the past, but it just did not work for you. If doing this a little bit at a time does not work, you may need to go the other way. Take everything off your desk and out of the drawers and add them to a box. Then go back to work. When you find that you need an item, put it back on the desk. After a few days, if there are still some things in the box, you most likely do not need them and can get rid of them.
- **Give it all a flow:** Now that you have taken some time to figure out what you want to keep, you need to figure out where to place it. The location of your things is just as important because you want to have quick access to the things you use a lot. You can organize the desk drawers by importance, making sure the stuff you use the most often is in the closest drawer. How this is organized will depend on how you work.
- **Tame the cables:** You should take some time to organize the cables that are on top of and under your desk. Rain gutters are a great management tool for these cables, or you can get something that is specifically designed for organizing cables. You can even consider purchasing technology that requires fewer wires and cables as well.

- Find your trouble spots: It can sometimes be difficult to look at your workspace and figure out how cluttered it is. Consider taking some pictures and then look at it from a different perspective. You may be surprised at how much the clutter will pop out at you. This can help you find your clutter trouble spots so you can work on them.
- Make your workspace larger: If you do end up having a lot of stuff that is important and you cannot get rid of it (but be honest about this), then you may need to add some extra storage or find ways to increase your workspace. Vertical storage may be your friend here. You can raise up the monitor to have space under it or you can use storage containers to put things on the walls or on shelves.
- Create some hidden storage: When you find that traditional shelves are not going to work for you, there are still a few other options. You may want to try out pegboard, an effective way to hide routers, cables, and other devices on the back of your desk. You can also hide a ton of stuff on the back of your monitor or use magnets to mount supplies wherever you need.
- Give everything its own home: Everything that is on your desk or in a drawer needs to have a home. It will stay there when you have your workspace cleaned. If something does not have its own home, it is going to just sit out and become clutter again. The breadbox test can help. If the item is smaller than a breadbox, it needs to be hidden away in a canister or drawer.
- Reboot your office every night: No matter how much you clean your workspace, you will probably make it at least a little bit messy during the day as you work. This is fine, as long as you clean up the mess when you are done. Before you head out the door each night, make sure that you clean off your desk. It should only take a few minutes, and then you will come into a clean desk each day. This can truly make you feel better about your workplace, which in turn, can make you feel more positively about your work in general.



Decluttering your workspace can make a big difference in how much you are able to get done during the day. It will help you know where every item is when you first look for it, to save you a lot of time, and it can help you keep your focus on the task rather than focusing on all of the clutter. It will also save you a lot of frustration.

HABIT NO. 14: SET A TIMER

The first tip that we are going to look at is setting a timer. This can help you in several ways. First, you can set your own deadlines for finishing individual tasks. Alternatively, you can decide that you will get as much done in twenty or thirty minutes as possible, and then take a break. This helps you avoid procrastination because you turn it into a race to complete your goals in time.



Let us say that you are working on a new presentation. You know from experience that this kind of work takes you around two hours to complete. Set the timer for two hours, and then start working. The timer will count down in front of you, so you know exactly how much time you have left. This can really help to keep your focus. Since you know that you only have two hours to get it done, you are less susceptible to distractions and less inclined to procrastinate.

You may not like deadlines, but they are going to spur you to take action right now. A timer is crucial to this process because it gives you a visual of the time you have left and the time that has passed. You need to place it somewhere that you can look at so that you can be mindful of that time. We are more likely to focus on the work that needs to be done, rather than wasting time procrastinating, because we become more aware of the time we allotted to the task is starting to run out.

The timer does make a big difference. You may know that you have two hours to get a task done, but you may not realize how much time is passing. The “two hours” are more of an idea than a concrete reality, in this instance. You will take breaks, talk to coworkers, do other things like check emails, and think you have plenty of time; but when you look at the clock and have half an hour to get two hours’ worth of work done you will regret the time that you wasted.

If you are someone who needs to take breaks in your work to keep you focused, you can split up the work into blocks. For instance, if the work is going to take you two hours, you could separate it into four 30-minute segments. After each 30 minute period is over, you can take a ten-minute break. You can get up and move around, get a drink or just clear your head. This can help you to not get too tired of working in one long segment of time, and you can still use the timer to keep you on track. You can adjust the timer to use a specific way, tailored to your mindset and personality.

Here are some tips to help you manage your time:

- Set reasonable deadlines. You cannot finish a task in an hour if it usually takes you two hours. Doing this will leave you frustrated and knowing you cannot succeed. Keep in mind that things often take longer than you might think and that some potential challenges may show up. So, if you work on a task that usually takes two hours, consider setting the time for 2.5 hours to give you this leeway if needed.
- Avoid deadlines that are too lenient. If you only need an hour to get something done, do not allow yourself two hours. This is too much

time and will lead you to miss out on the sense of urgency benefit of having a timer.

- You can create a reward or consequence system. If you meet the deadline that you set, you can come up with some type of reward, such as a piece of chocolate. However, if you do not make the deadline, you would deprive yourself of this reward.
- Work in smaller time chunks. You may find that it is difficult to work for two or three hours at a time on one project, even if that is how long the project will take. Break it up into smaller chunks. This allows the project to be that much more manageable. Set the timer for about an hour or less at a time and then take some small breaks in between. You will be amazed at what a difference this can make!

When choosing a timer to use, there are three options—Google, a phone app, or a kitchen timer. If you are able to put the timer on your phone and not get tempted to play on it, then those can be great resources for timers. Digital timers are good because you will not have to worry about how distracting the phone can be, and they are great to take with you wherever you need to work.

HABIT NO. 15: TURN OFF THE PHONE AND HIDE IT

A big culprit of your lack of focus is your phone. It can do so even if you do not answer it or look at the text when it rings, vibrates, chirps, or beeps. Researchers reported evidence of how the phone can distract you in a 2015 article in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*.



In this study, the researchers monitored the performance of 212 Florida State University undergraduate students. The students were divided into three groups—those who received calls, those who received texts, and those who did not receive any kind of phone notifications.

The findings were that cellular phone notifications alone could disrupt the performance of attention-demanding tasks, even if the participants did not interact directly with the mobile device when they heard it.

You have most likely experienced this at some point. It's not hard to understand how calls and texts that have nothing to do with the work you are doing can break your concentration. It is not just the act of stopping your work and reaching for the phone that can break your concentration; just hearing your phone, even if you don't answer it, is a distraction. The notifications are going to keep pulling at your attention and bugging you until you take a break and check them.

It is so important for you to turn off your phone when you are working, especially if it is something that needs a lot of your attention. You will find that it is easier to focus and you will be better set up to avoid other distractions as well. You will avoid seeing things that alert you about new text messages, new emails, and new voicemails, and you will not be stuck in the trap of checking social media either.

Turning your phone off—not silencing it but turning it completely off—can make a big difference. You will be more productive, stop making as many errors, and feel more relaxed in the process. You will also feel quite a bit happier because you will get more done during the same period and will have handled some attention-demanding work because you were not paying attention to the phone.

This will be difficult for some. You may need to take some extra steps to make sure that you do not use your phone when you need to get work done. Turn off your phone and put it in a drawer across the room or give it to someone else to hold until you are done with a big project.

There are also apps that you can use that will disable the internet on your phone for a few hours or more at a time. You can set how long it should be turned off to correspond with the work that you need to get done. You will not be able to get online with the phone, no matter what, until that time is over, so you are more likely to concentrate on the task at hand. If you need an app, consider working with Offtime, AppDetox, Moment, BreakFree, and Forest.

HABIT NO. 16: SAVE YOUR EMAILS FOR LATER IN THE DAY

Your email can cause just as many problems for you as any other distraction. Even if you are checking it to see if there are any important emails for work, it can end up being a big distraction. One of the problems with spending time checking your email is that it often seems harmless. You sign into your email account thinking it will only take a few minutes, but it always ends up taking longer. Your brain convinces you that it will just be a quick check, and so you log on and end up spending a ton of time there, much more than you had originally planned.



Another way that email distracts us is if you keep a browser tab open in your email program, which can be irresistible when a new message comes up. You may see on the tab that one or two new messages have arrived, and you want to take a moment to see who sent them and what they are. You may know that it is more important to stay on task, but you decide that it may be something that needs a response now. Therefore, you stop working and check your email. Most of the time, the issue is not that important, and

it may have even been spam. Nevertheless, you still stopped your concentration and stopped doing the work that needed to be done, and possibly for something of little to no value.

Another problem can come up when you leave your email open when you are trying to get work done. It can agitate the fear of missing out, also known as FOMO. This fear will prompt you to check your phone right away when a new text shows up. You do not want to miss any opportunity, whether to hear the newest gossip, enjoy a meme online, or engage with one of your friends. FOMO is a big reason a new email will draw your attention so much. However, when you succumb to the temptation of looking through your email, it will destroy any focus that you have.

It is best to avoid your email, if possible, at least for the majority of the day. You should never keep your email tab open when you are working, and do not give in to checking your email whenever the mood suits you. Moreover, do not check to see if you got a response to an email that you had sent out earlier in the day.

The best option is to check your email only two times during the day. Choose times that are going to work with your energy levels and your workflow productivity. Often, this means that you are not going to choose to open your email when you first get to work in the morning. This becomes a trap where you will spend a ton of time reading and responding to your messages, and you will not end up getting anything done. You do not want to waste those high energy morning hours on a task that is not that critical just to check a few emails.

Checking your emails right before you head to lunch is a good idea. You are probably getting low on energy at this time anyway. Moreover, you are more likely to rush through them because you will want to get out the door and go eat something, rather than reading them. You can do the same thing when it is time to leave for the evening. In this way, you can almost trick yourself into limiting your e-mail checkups to a certain amount of time. Catch up on all your correspondences right before you head out the door so that you do it quickly to get home to your family.

Now, depending on your personal energy levels, and the obligations that you have both at work and at home, you may have a different schedule for checking your emails. Follow these suggestions when determining the best time to check your email:

1. Review your own personal schedule: You can look at your schedule and determine when you absolutely must check your email. Make sure that you are honest and practical here. Remember that avoiding your email for only a few hours is not likely going to be the end of the world. If someone at work really needs you right away, they will walk over to your office if they do not hear back through email.
2. Choose two times during the day: After you check your personal energy levels, you will have a solid idea of how your energy will fluctuate during the day. You should choose two low-energy times during the day to check your email. These are times when you are not likely to get much done anyway, which makes them perfect for looking over any emails that you may have.
3. Tell others about the email policy: It is likely that family members, friends, co-workers, and your boss are going to have expectations in place regarding how long it takes you to respond to an email. You should let anyone important know that going forward, you will only check your emails two times a day. You can also inform them of the two times that you've selected. This encourages them to adjust their expectations and lets them know why you may not be responding to them right away, and communicating this can help both parties going forward.

Checking your email only two times a day is a great way for you to work with the maximum amount of focus. Moreover, it makes it easier for you to leverage those periods of the day when you naturally have a higher energy level.

You may find in the beginning that this policy is difficult to follow, especially if you are addicted to checking your email. You may need to give yourself some time to adjust to the changes. You may also need to consider giving yourself a routine reality check. Whenever you feel the temptation to

check your email when you should be doing some work, remember to ask yourself:

What is the worst that could happen if I avoid my email for just a few hours today?

It is likely that the worst-case scenario is not something that is likely to happen. Everyone will survive if you do not answer for a few hours, so turn off the email and keep your focus on the things that you need to concentrate on the most.

HABIT NO. 17: DON'T LET OTHERS DISTRACT YOU

No one is going to care as much about your time or focus than you do. No one else is going to hold any responsibility for it. It is up to you to figure out how to set others' expectations so you can get more done at work. As an adult, you certainly can't expect others to consider your work a priority, or "hold your hand" through your tasks.



If you want to avoid any traps of a reactive workflow, in which you are always catering to the impromptu demands of others, then you must start setting rules that concern your availability. In addition, you must also take the time to explain these new rules to those who are most likely to stop by and disrupt your work. Otherwise, you are making yourself vulnerable to interruptions, which can make it difficult to achieve the focus that you want.

The first step is to identify the most common circumstances that make it difficult to concentrate and interrupt your workflow. Some possibilities are:

- Coworkers who are always stopping by the office to ask for help on something or just to chat
- If you are at home, people may often drop by unannounced and then expect you to invite them in and entertain them for a couple of hours.
- Friends and family members who call you on the phone and expect that you will take those calls
- Coworkers who email you and then expect you to respond to them in an hour or less
- Friends who like to text you at all times of the day and still expect that you are going to respond back to them right away

It is likely the most burdensome expectations - those that have the biggest impact on your focus and productivity - are coming from just a few people in your life. With this in mind, the second step that you can do is make a list of the top five “offenders”. These people do the things in the list above on a regular basis and disrupt your focus.

Think about a coworker who always seems to drop by the office and wants to chat for a long time. Think of that family member who seems to get easily irritated if you do not return their emails and calls right away. Think of that friend who has to send you dozens of texts each day and then wants you to respond to each one right away. They might even react negatively if you choose to not respond within a certain window of time. Alternatively, think of that neighbor who often drops by unannounced, just because they know you are home, without realizing that you are working.

It is likely that you can count the worst offenders of this on just one hand. After you come up with this list, move on to the third step—brainstorm ideas to help reset their expectations. This certainly doesn’t have to be malicious in any way, but it should be done if you want to maintain a certain amount of focus.

For instance, if you have a coworker who is stopping by often, you can tell them that you would love to chat, but you are too busy in the morning, assure them that you will be happy to talk with them after lunch.

Alternatively, you could close your door and the blinds and make it look like no one is there, which may stop any of the random coworkers who are trying to stop by. This is a great way to communicate non-verbally that it might not be the time to socialize.

Never be scared to reset the expectations of others. Remember, they are not going to do this on their own. Moreover, it is never a good idea to let your frustration build up so that you are upset and do not handle it well. This can end up being much worse than politely explaining that you are busy at a certain moment in time. You should approach your top offenders with diplomacy and civility, and then ask them to work in a way that is better for you. You may be surprised by how receptive they are to your feedback along the way, and it might even gain you respect in your workplace. If you do not ask them to make changes, they are not going to, and you will never get the work done.

HABIT NO. 18: FREE UP YOUR CALENDAR A FEW TIMES DURING THE DAY

If you are still finding it difficult to focus, you may be falling into the trap of filling up your calendar too much during the day. Many people think that the only way they can be productive and get work done is if every minute of every day has something planned, so they work to fill up their calendars. This can backfire in a tremendous way.



Filling up your calendar like this will have the opposite effect on your productivity. Sure, it sounds like a good idea and you may think you will get more done but focusing that much each day will eventually catch up with you.

The first issue is scheduling too much into your day. This may seem productive, but you will just stress your body out, and the more stress that you feel, the harder it is to get things done. It can actually end up taking a physical toll, in addition to the mental strain that will be caused.

Another problem is that you are not working with your energy levels when you go about filling up your calendar. You are assuming that you will have high amounts of energy throughout the day without any dips. However, everyone has highs and lows with their energy levels, and if you just fill up your calendar, you are going to end up harming yourself and making it difficult to focus.

It is important to pick a few key things during your day. This frees up some of the calendar so that you can concentrate better. If you are not constantly worried about how much time you have to get things done during the day, and if you are not worried about playing catch up if something takes some time, you can work more efficiently. You can also work knowing that you are not rushing through it so that a certain standard of work can be maintained.

When you look at your calendar and see that it is very full, especially around those times of low energy, then it is time to make some changes. You should see if there are a few things that you can cut out of your schedule. What are some things that you do not need to get done that day? What are some things that are just going to be time wasters? Is there a meeting that you could skip or cut short? Is a particular project really going to need that much time? You'd be surprised how much more productive your day can be with a few small schedule adjustments.

Just a few minutes of reviewing your schedule and making some changes can make a big difference. It can reduce your stress because you will not feel as stressed out for time. So, make sure that your calendar only has a few items on it each day (you can always add more if you have the time and energy), and see how much you get done.

CHAPTER 5: SELF-CARE FOR TURBO-CHARGED FOCUS

HABIT NO. 19: LEARN TO WORK WITH YOUR OWN ENERGY LEVELS

You have probably noticed that your energy levels fluctuate throughout the day. You have times when you are pretty productive and ready to take on a big workload, and then there are times when you drink five cups of coffee, and still cannot seem to concentrate. During a period of high energy, you are more likely to feel productive and focused. However, in a period of low energy, you are more prone to becoming distracted. The trick to making sure that you are as focused as possible is to identify when these periods are for you, and then organize your workflow so that you make the best use of this.



Keep in mind that this is going to be a bit different for everyone. Some people find that early in the morning is when they are able to get a ton done. They might have been “morning people” for a long time already. They can hurry through all their projects by lunchtime, but if anything happens in the afternoon, they are going to be worthless. Some people do better in the afternoons, and others do their best when working at night. You have to monitor your own energy levels to figure out what works best for you, and do not worry so much about what works for other people.

The first step that you should do is create a spreadsheet. Google Sheets is a good option because it is free, and you will be able to access the information from any device that you want. You can use the first column to designate the time of day, going in 15-minute increments. Start at the time that you wake up and then end at the time that you usually go to bed at night.

The next column needs to be labeled “Energy Level.” Here you are going to pay attention and record your levels of energy at different times of the day.

You should use values between one and five, with one be high energy and five being low energy.

The third column can be “Notes.” Here you are going to add in any details that you think may be relevant about the energy levels and why they fluctuate. For example, you may want to write down what you eat with each meal to see if there is a pattern that relates to your energy levels.

The second step is to start keeping track of how your energy levels do over the next few weeks. Two to three weeks is best to help you get a good picture. You should input the values between one and five into your spreadsheet at different times of the day, which does not have to be done every 15 minutes. Do it any time that you see a shift in your energy levels. Nevertheless, remember that the more you record, the better it will be when you want to determine your energy levels later on.

Some good times to report your energy is in the morning when you wake up, before and after each meal and snack, and near your bedtime. These are times your energy levels are most likely to change. However, if you notice there is a big change in your energy level at a different time, report it as well.

When you eat and record, you can write down if you have a heavy or light lunch. This can help you figure out whether your energy levels are being impacted not just by the time of day, but also by what you eat. This also helps you adjust accordingly so that you can know the relationship between your body and mind more intimately.

The third step of this process is going to occur after you have spent a few weeks tracking your energy. This is the time when you review your spreadsheet, look through each day, and see if there are any trends. You can start to note when your energy levels are high and when they are low. For some, energy levels may plummet mid-afternoon and then recover around suppertime. This can vary from person to person, so do not worry if your high energy and low energy times are different from others. This is natural, as everyone’s body is different.

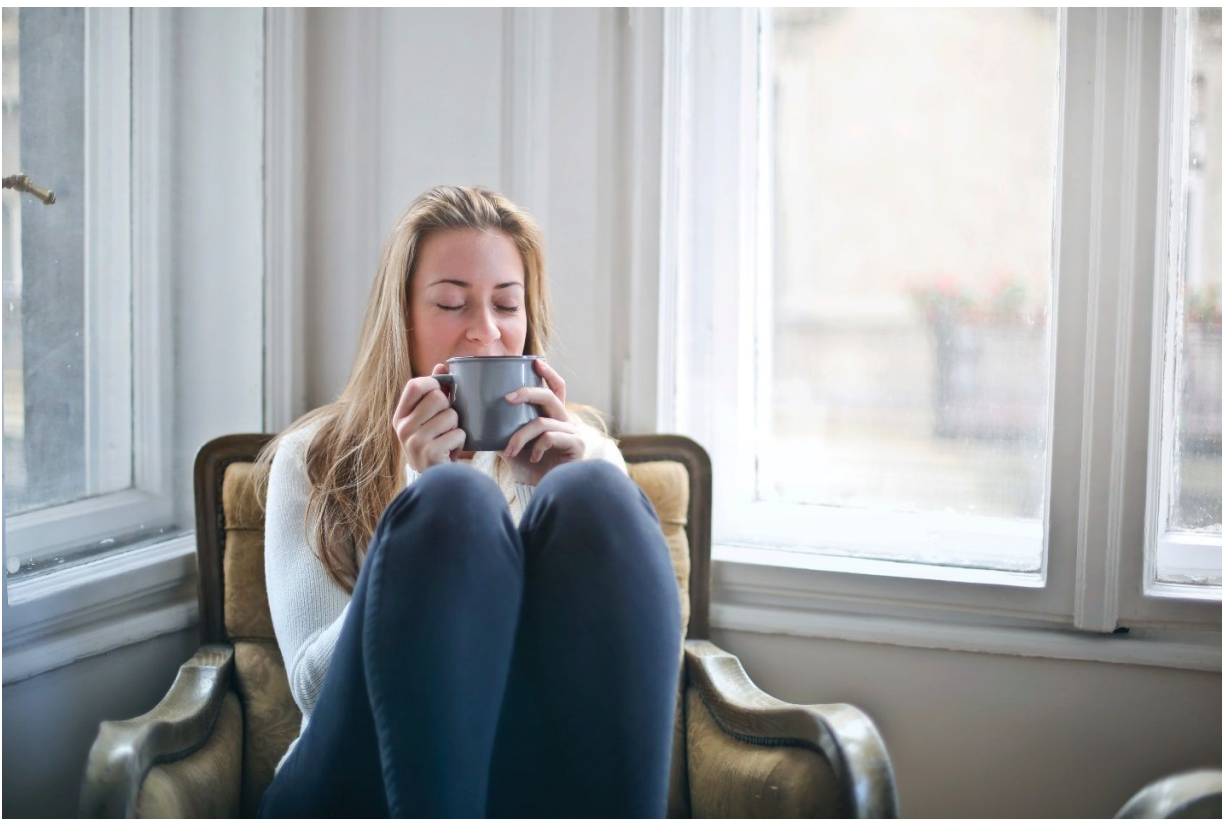
Once you figure out the low energy and high-energy times of day, you can learn how to adjust the workflow that you have to complement them. You can schedule your deep work or the type of work that requires a lot of focus from you during those high-energy periods. Then you can schedule your breaks and easier work, such as returning phone calls, scheduling meetings, and replying to emails, during times of lower energy.

You can also use this information to look for changes you can make to help you leverage your high-energy periods. For example, you may notice that larger meals were horrible for your energy level, which are going to impair your ability to concentrate, can make you tired, and can make it easier for you to become distracted.

Your energy levels—ups and downs—will vary from what someone else has. Some people are most energetic in the morning, but there are others who find that the late morning or even later at night is the best time for them to get things done. Your spreadsheet will help you figure out when these high energy levels are for you so you can make your schedule work for you.

HABIT NO. 20: MAKE SURE TO TAKE BREAKS

When you begin a long project, it is tempting to just sit down and try to get it all done at once. However, this makes it difficult to maintain your focus throughout. Taking some small breaks while you work can help keep you on task and focused. When you spend too much time working on a project, you may notice your brain start to drift, no matter how hard you try to focus, and you just end up wasting time. The brain is not designed to focus on something for hours without rest.



Working without taking breaks can lead to boredom, which can make you vulnerable to distractions, making it impossible to concentrate. Taking breaks gives your brain a breather so it can process new information, form new connections, and commit important information to memory. Breaks also allow you to come back to your work feeling refreshed, which makes it so much easier to manage your attention and keep those distractions away.

There are many reasons you may choose not to take a break, such as feeling guilty for not getting the work done, or worrying you are wasting time when you're not working. This can prove to be detrimental. You may also feel like you will get behind or in trouble if you stop working. The irony of this is that working without taking these breaks will result in the outcome that you are trying to avoid. Without rest, your mind will become less efficient, you will make mistakes, and you will be less productive, which results in you spending more time on a project than necessary.

When you choose to add breaks into your day, there are several ways to go about it. You can go with the one that seems to work best with your workflow, with how you get stuff done, or with the particular project that you are trying to finish.

- **Go in time chunks:** The Pomodoro Technique is a great option for most people. It schedules the breaks for you, regardless of whether you are losing focus or not. You work for 25 minutes and when that time is up, you take a five- to ten-minute break. After three of these in a row, you take a twenty-minute break. You can also break it down into different time limits. If you can concentrate well for an hour and then need a break, then set it up like that.
- **Monitor your attention levels:** You have to have a certain level of self-awareness when it comes to this one. When you start to feel that your focus is waning, it is time to take a break. You can get up and get a snack, drink some water, stretch, and walk around. You just need to do something to break up the work session and let your brain have a break. Of course, you should choose something to do during the break that won't lead to excessive distraction.
- **Power naps are your friend:** These power naps are short, usually between 10 to 30 minutes. A ten-minute nap gives you an opportunity to close your eyes and relax for a few minutes. You can organize your work into chunks of 45-minutes, and then take a ten-minute power nap between those times. It will not take long until you feel excited about these breaks, and it can do wonders for helping you concentrate.

- Socialize your breaks: You can make your breaks fun. If you like to be social, then this is a good option for you. Calling friends and loved ones for a few minutes can be a nice incentive for you to get your work done, and you will not be tempted to talk to them when you need to be working. Of course, if you end up speaking with the person for over the allotted time; it would defeat the purpose.
- Make the breaks into a game: Playing a game during your break can make the break a little more fun. You could play a game of solitaire with cards or a quick game app on your phone or computer—whatever you find enjoyable, yet not too challenging. It's important to remember that the task should be a fun way to take a break, and not a time-consuming or stress-inducing game that could “suck you in” because ultimately, it's about returning to your work.

These are just a few ideas to try, or you can come up with a method that works for you. The important thing to remember is that you must find a way to give yourself and your mind a break, rather than trying to work nonstop through the day. While this may seem counterintuitive, it will keep your mind focused and can actually help you get more done.

HABIT NO. 21: CONSIDER AEROBIC EXERCISE

Exercise is a great way to help increase the amount of focus that you have on the day. A ton of studies out there shows how great exercise can be for your whole body and mind. It can reduce your risk of Alzheimer's, improve your cognitive power, boost your memory, and help you to improve how well you manage your attention. This means that if you engage in aerobic exercise, it is much easier to focus when you are done.



The science behind this can be found in the hippocampus, the part of the brain that is responsible for helping you produce new memories. Neurologists have studied this and found that aerobic exercise is able to increase the amount of blood flow to the hippocampus. This can help to elevate how alert and focused you are so that you can devote more of your attentional resources to the task in front of you.

So, how are you able to use this information to your advantage? Before you have to study or sit down to get work done, make sure that you complete a

good exercise routine.

This does not mean that you need to go to the gym to get it done, and you do not even need to go on a long run either, unless you want to. Just sixty seconds of some energetic physical exertion will give you the same results and can help to increase that focus. Some ideas that you can try out include:

- Shadow box for a minute
- Jump rope for a minute
- Do a quick sprint outside
- Ten chair dips
- 20 jumping jacks
- Ten crunches
- Ten squats
- Ten pushups

The goal of these exercises, even though they are only for a minute, is to help elevate your heart rate. According to researchers, this helps increase how much red blood cells you have that are providing oxygen straight to your brain. It is only going to take you 60 seconds to do and can be great if you are doing your work in short time blocks. After 30 minutes of working, spend part of your ten-minute break doing some exercises and you will see better results. This is an extremely small investment to make both short-term and long-term for your focus and your mindset.

In addition to the research above, it has also been found that regular exercise is able to increase the volume of a protein that is responsible for helping the brain grow. The protein is called BDNF or brain-derived neurotrophic factor. It may be responsible for neuron growth and can help improve the synaptic transmission.

While this may sound very technical, it means that it helps your brain with information processions, attention management, and with better memory. Essentially, exercise helps you think better, in new ways, and more clearly.

If you are having trouble concentrating on the work in front of you, roll up your sleeves and do a quick burst of physical activity. It will only take a minute and can boost your focus like nothing else.

HABIT NO. 22: BRING YOUR FOCUS BACK WITH MEDITATION

It has long been known that meditation is a great way to improve your focus, help you stay on pace, and reclaim your sense of inner calm. It is a good tool to purge away the stress and distractions that you have that are burdening you and keeping you from being present in the moment.



Researchers have found that meditation can have many benefits when it comes to your attention. In 2007, a study was published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, about a group of 40 Chinese college students. The authors found that the time these students spent in meditation led to big improvements in how well they were able to concentrate.

Meditation does not have to be complicated, and it does not require you to sit with candles or burn incense. You do not need to mutter strange sayings or sit until your legs go numb to make it work. Many people have the wrong idea about how meditation works. Nevertheless, meditation works well for everyone, and you can even add some modifications that will make it work better for you.

Meditation comes in many different forms. Some of the forms are simple enough that you are able to complete them from anywhere, as long as you can get to a place where you get some peace and quiet. In addition, some of them can take you just minutes to complete. If you need a quick meditation session while you are at work to help you get back on track with your project, this can be incorporated into your lifestyle.

Mindful meditation is a good choice. This simple form involves you relaxing enough that you can focus your energy on breathing. You set a timer for just three to four minutes, and then close your eyes. During this time, you will take in slow and deep breaths. You need to concentrate, as much as possible, on each inhalation and exhalation, while trying to ignore all other thoughts.

You can do this anywhere you want, and, with the right circumstances, anytime you want. It even works if you are doing it at your desk during one of your breaks. Nevertheless, you can choose to do it anywhere, as long as you are in a place that is peaceful and quiet. You can choose to sit or stand, you can even keep your eyes open if you are able to concentrate while doing it, and you can personalize this to work the best for your needs.

You only need to do this for a few minutes to feel more refocused, refreshed, and relaxed than before. Try different types of meditation to see which one works the best for you.

In addition to doing these short little sessions of meditation at your desk or anywhere that you need to focus, you can start implementing regular meditation sessions into your day. There are many who have found great results with a ten-minute session before they get up for the day and another ten-minute session when they are ready to go to bed. This can often be enough to keep you calm, focused, and ready to take on the day. If you want

to set yourself up to have a great day every day, then a few minutes in meditation can make a big difference.

HABIT NO. 23: THE DANGERS OF DRINKING TOO MUCH CAFFEINE

Ok, some of you probably read this one and started freaking out. You worry that you will not be able to give up your daily cup of coffee and dread trying to get any work done without a little jolt to help you out. First, we need to look at the good news.



There are some benefits of consuming caffeine, as long as you do it in moderation. Studies show that caffeine in moderation can help increase your energy, improve your memory, and lift your mood. As long as you do not take in too much of it through the day, caffeine is able to elevate your mental alertness.

Caffeine poses a problem when you consume too much, as the consequences of doing so can be severe, including high blood pressure, increased stress levels, restlessness, and insomnia. Research also shows that

having an excess amount of caffeine consumption can lead to anxiety disorders. In fact, caffeine-induced anxiety disorder is now categorized in the DSM-5, or the Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (2013), that is considered the definitive text and principle authority for psychiatric disorders.

It is clear that the amount of the caffeine that you consume each day is going to have a direct influence on the ability you have to concentrate. Unfortunately, many people mistake being awake as being hyper-focused. We wrongly assume that as long as we stay awake, we are doing something right, and then we consume more caffeine than we really should.

Think back to a time when you took in too much caffeine and it made you feel jittery. You probably had a hard time concentrating. Clearly, being awake is not the same thing as being in a state of focus, at all.

The key here is to make sure that the amount of caffeine you consume is moderate. Health experts claim that this amount is near 400 milligrams. To give you a reference point, a 20-ounce cup of Starbucks “Pike Place” coffee has about 415 mg of caffeine.

If you are drinking a lot more than that, you are probably impairing, rather than helping your ability to concentrate. You may want to consider cutting back, which is not only going to help you to relax and sleep better, but it can also make it easier to manage your attention.

Remember, caffeine can come from a wide variety of sources, from coffee and soda to some foods like chocolate. Do not forget that many of those energy drinks have a ton of caffeine as well. You need to cut back your consumption of all of these if you want to get your focus back on track and start actively observing how much you are consuming, in order to take precautions.

Of course, unless your doctor has some reason for you to stop drinking caffeine completely, it is fine to drink some, as long as you do so in moderate levels. Moderate consumption has benefits but drinking too much will ruin all your work with focus.

If you are someone who drinks a ton of caffeine, in coffee or energy drinks or soda, you may need to cut back slowly. Doing too much too fast can leave you feeling sluggish and with headaches, which is not good for your focus either. Cutting back a little bit at a time helps you adjust. You want to cut back until you get down to the 400 milligrams that are suggested. It may take a while, but it can be amazing for your concentration.

HABIT NO. 24: EAT A HEALTHY DIET

The foods that you eat influence your focus. Those who eat a lot of food before doing work or a meal full of fast food or junk, find that they are just not able to concentrate when they are ready to work. The types of foods that you consume will make a big difference in how well you can concentrate on your tasks. As the saying goes, “You are what you eat”.



Eating a large meal—or one that is full of unhealthy foods like sugars or fried foods—is going to slow you down. It can make you feel overwhelmed because all your body wants to do is go to sleep rather than work. All the extra blood flow that you need to go to your brain in order to get work done is heading to your stomach to help with digestion. To make matters worse, the sugars and fast foods do not provide any type of nutritional value to your body, so you are not even fueling it up properly.

The best thing that you can do to ensure that you take care of your body and you do not hit a wall after you eat at work is to make sure you fill your

body with healthy nutrients. A light meal that has all the nutrients that you need can be a fantastic way for you to feel good and keep getting things done because your focus has not run off. If you want a big meal, save it for the end of the day, when you are not going to do any more work, but still, make sure it is full of healthy nutrients that the body needs.

Your body needs to get plenty of healthy nutrients in it to fuel your brain, give your muscles the help they need, and keep you fuller for longer so you do not end up getting distracted by hunger. We all know how it goes when you eat a breakfast or lunch full of sugars and bad foods. Not only are you tired afterward, it also does not take long until you are hungry again.

So, how do you make sure you eat healthily? Include these things to help improve your concentration:

- **Protein:** Make sure that your breakfast and lunch contain healthy portions of protein. A turkey sandwich can fit the bill so it does not have to be complicated. Having some leftover chicken breast or fish for lunch works nicely. Bacon and eggs in the morning would also be good. Protein can provide your body with many of the nutrients it needs to stay focused and keep you feeling fuller for longer. For those who are more inclined towards vegan or vegetarian options, consider tofu, quinoa, or other options.
- **Fruits and vegetables:** These can be nice for providing your body with the nutrients it needs for focus, filling you up, and even providing you with that little (healthy) sugar rush that you need if you are feeling lethargic come lunchtime. Try to fill up your plate (or whatever type of container you bring to work for lunch) with lots of healthy fruits and vegetables and see what a difference it can make.
- **Dairy products:** Have yogurt with your breakfast or bring one along as a snack when you get hungry, or you can bring some milk to drink along with your lunch. Dairy products can help to fill you up, and the vitamin D is fantastic for keeping your brain on task—not to mention the calcium is going to be great for your bones.
- **Carbs:** It is fine to bring some carbs along for lunch; you just need to be careful about what kinds you are consuming. Do not bring a big sandwich from the local fast food joint. Try to stay away from refined

and white sugars, like those that are in lots of snacks. Go for whole grain or whole wheat varieties, such as a little pasta or some bread with a sandwich. If you do bring a treat, keep it small, such as one cookie, and do not consume it during your high-energy time.

- Don't forget the snack: It is likely that when you spend so much time concentrating on getting work done, that you may be hungrier than normal. You may want to have a little snack around to help you out when this hunger strikes. Keep some granola, nuts, or even some yogurt or fruit nearby to help you take care of that hunger without feeling tempted to eat something that is not as healthy. This can certainly give you a little fuel throughout the day to help keep you going.

Filling your body up can make a big difference in how good you feel. It can help keep you focused and become your biggest ally against distractions, as long as you make sure that you are consuming the right types of foods. Keep these major food groups in mind, and you are sure to avoid that afternoon slump, at least a little bit.

HABIT NO. 25 : MAKE SURE THAT YOU GET ENOUGH SLEEP

Finally, you need to make sure that you are getting plenty of sleep if you want to be able to focus on the work that you must get done. Many Americans are just not getting enough sleep. They are too busy trying to keep up with everything that they need. By the time they get home from work, eat, take care of kids, and do other things around the house, it is late, and they still have things to finish up, only to get up early in the morning.



However, when you are not well rested, it is almost impossible for you to have any focus. You are too tired to focus, and distractions are going to be all around you. Setting up a good bedtime routine and making sure that you stick with it is critical to helping you see some results. None of the other tips in this guidebook are going to work that well if you are not getting enough sleep at night.

Follow these tips when you are ready to start getting more sleep:

- **Set up a bedtime routine:** Remember how we talked about the importance of a routine earlier on? A bedtime routine can be just as important when you are trying to fall asleep at night. This helps to prepare your brain for sleep so that you can fall asleep faster than ever before. You can make it as simple or as complex as you would like. For example, after you eat, you may choose to take a bath or shower, get dressed, and brush your teeth, moisturize, read a chapter or two from a book, listen to a podcast, and then head to bed. Personalize the bedtime routine so that it works for your needs.
- **Turn off the electronics an hour before:** It is tempting to spend the evening online, watching a movie, or playing on your phone or with some other electronics. However, this can affect how much sleep you can get. It is often recommended that for those who have trouble falling asleep at night, it is best to turn off those electronics at least an hour before you are ready to go to bed. Often times, you can end up staying up too late, absorbing some content that you might not even truly care about ultimately. You can spend that time talking to your family, reading a book, or doing something else that will help you wind down from the day.
- **Write down what you need to do the next day:** Instead of waiting until the next day, why not consider making a to-do list the night before. Some people cannot fall asleep because they are so worried about forgetting to do something the next day. All of these thoughts will tumble around in their heads, and it is almost impossible for them to fall asleep. Writing them down before you go to sleep can take away some of the worries so that you can actually fall asleep.
- **Keep your room cool:** Research has found that keeping your room cool can make a big difference in how well you sleep, and this has been confirmed by organizations such as The National Sleep Foundation. You do not have to keep it freezing but turning it down a few degrees may be the tip that you need to start sleeping better. You can always wear pajamas that are a little warmer and keep a blanket on you to help if needed.

- Turn off the lights: Do not leave lights on when it is time to go to bed. Light signals to the body that it is time to be up and moving and that is the opposite of what you want when it is time to get some sleep. Turn off all the lights, and even make sure that your phone or alarm clock does not emit too much light.
- Turn on some quiet music if needed. For some people, it is too difficult to fall asleep without any noise at all, which is why they choose to turn on the television or other noise to help them. However, the television is actually going to cause issues with how deeply you can sleep. If you are not able to sleep in complete silence, consider turning on some music to help; nature sounds or classical music can really do the trick.
- Have a set bedtime and wake time: Many people change up their schedules from the weekend compared to the weekday. They may stay up later and sleep in longer because they do not have anywhere they need to be. However, this can be hard on the body because it gets confused. Moreover, when you are confused and tired in the process, it is difficult to focus. Try setting up a bedtime and a wake time that you are able to follow every day of the week to ensure your body gets in a rhythm that can help with your focus.

CONCLUSION

Many people are looking for focus. They spend their time being distracted and end up scrambling, procrastinating, and rushing to meet a certain deadline that they could have easily met if they had efficiently broken up the work into manageable chunks and taken the right steps to ensure that their workflow was streamlined. Of course, more often than not, this is not what they want. They certainly intended to complete their work in an efficient manner, but the circumstances, whether it is their workplace, office, friends, diet, sleep pattern, or countless other factors, have all contributed to preventing this from happening.



Focus can truly change your life. It can lead you to thinking differently, documenting your thoughts better, having more energy throughout the day, completing more work in less time, seeing things from a different perspective, more confidence, less clutter, and stronger relationships. It is astounding to think that adjusting this one metric in your life can lead to so many positive outcomes. That's why this book can truly transform the way that you approach your work and life in general.

The truth is that without focus, many of us would be lost. There is more content and data produced than ever before in human civilization, and it is

easy to get lost and distracted from all of the content around us, rather than focus on what needs to be done. It doesn't matter whether the distraction is a YouTube video, a text, a tweet, a shout, a nosy neighbor, or a co-worker: they exist, and they are constant. Our professional lives depend on our ability to spend our mental energy properly, our tolerance to mental fatigue, and the feeling of being equipped to cope.

These 25 tips should help to ensure that you get your work done efficiently and productively. Of course, this requires effort and discipline on your part. You might realize that distractions are bad, that the right diet is essential, and that the correct sleep patterns can prove productive – but none of it truly means anything unless you have the willpower to truly implement these changes and communicate to those around you that you have certain boundaries that should not be tampered with.

The important thing to remember is that these steps don't necessarily have to be difficult and that your habits might not change overnight. It certainly isn't insanely hard to create a checklist or to manage one task at a time instead of multi-tasking or avoiding meetings that probably had no real purpose anyway. However, these small changes can truly work wonders.

It's also important to remember to customize and personalize these tips to your own life. Everyone has their own body, mind, and willpower, and it should be important to recognize your own limits and weaknesses. For some, limiting certain alerts is a realistic goal, while for others, it might not really work that way with their particular occupation, or life. Similarly, there are all sorts of different workplace dynamics, with regards to meetings and social conversations. You might not enjoy music in the background, and you might not enjoy making to-do lists. Every tip might work for your own particular life, but there is no doubt that overall, many of these can be positively incorporated for great results.

It's important to have some level of self-awareness in order to truly improve your focus. That's why understanding your personal triggers, monitoring your energy levels, understanding how food and sleep affects your body, can all truly contribute to the way that you absorb information, and how you personally approach your goals and tasks. There are certain methods

that work for some people that will not work for others, and rather than remain stubborn and stand by a process that clearly isn't working, it's important for you to adjust accordingly and understand when a certain method just "isn't for you".

Life requires focus. It demands it in both of our personal and professional lives. It's easy to see how a stressful work life can end up affecting the way that you interact with your friends and family negatively, which ultimately can affect your quality of life. Focus can lead to all sorts of amazing things: you can get more work done in less time, advance professionally in ways that you didn't think were possible, and enjoy a work-life balance that you never experienced before. Hopefully, this book can help you lead a more focused and productive life, in every way possible.

THANKS FOR READING!

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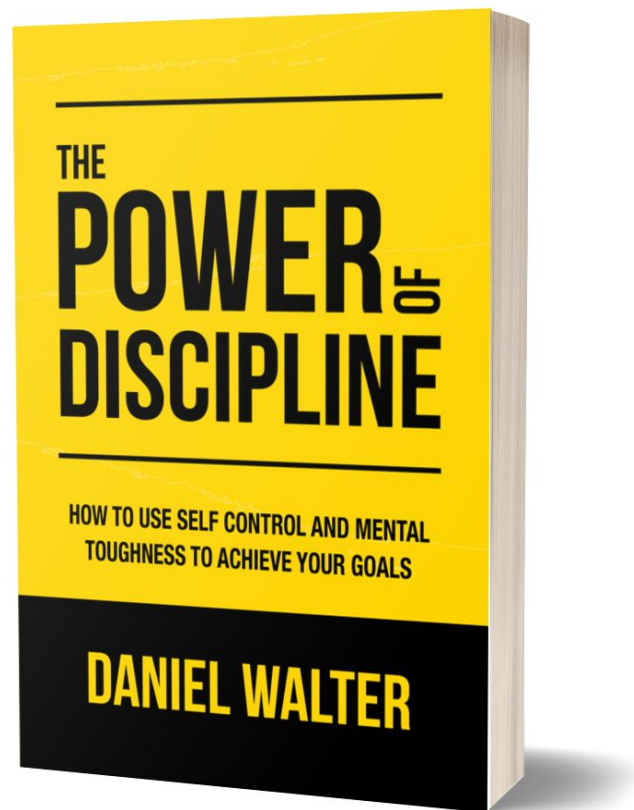
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TAKE BACK YOUR DAY

HOW SIMPLE DAILY ACTIONS CAN CHANGE YOUR
LIFE

BY: DANIEL WALTER

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INTRODUCTION

The time has come to stop convincing yourself that external issues, be they endless distractions, annoying coworkers, or anything else that makes a convenient scapegoat, are the problem and start looking inside and taking responsibility for the issues with creativity, focus, or productivity that you find there. While there will never be a perfect time to move forward with your personal goals, there are likely a number of personal issues you can nullify upfront to make the entire process that much easier in the long-run.

The importance of routine

While everyone is likely weighed down by a few of these issues, most people rarely ever face them head on because they don't have a way to anticipate when the particular issue is going to raise its ugly head and start causing issues. This is why it is so important to build a positive routine around reaching the goals designed to help you deal with the issues that matter to you most.

Building routines into your day makes it possible for you to take an analytical, rational, and, most importantly, regular look at not just what you are doing but why you are doing each individual part of it. The best part is that this time to analyze your processes comes naturally. Your mind will have time to focus on the specifics of what you are doing because it doesn't need to worry about what it is going to do in the midst of something unexpected already taking place.

That is, of course, assuming you do things in a mindful way. Mindfulness is discussed in great detail later on. For now, suffice it to say that remaining mindful will allow you to engage with your created routines in such a way that you remain vigilant against bad habits seeping in overtime and turning your finely tuned personal machine into something less than what it was.

The always on problem: Unfortunately, when it comes to building a routine, most people are too caught up with staying on top of a host of different inboxes to think about creating anything that will benefit them in the long-term. While unfortunate, it is understandable, as dealing with so many notifications on a constant basis forces the brain into a reactionary state where it is always looking for new external feedback as opposed to turning inward when it comes time to decide what happens next.

If you find yourself with this mindset it, in turn, makes it far more difficult to be proactive when it comes to being proactive about the things that matter most to you. Being always connected and informed about something new ultimately becomes a disadvantage when it creates a deluge of information in danger of sweeping you away. The fact of the matter is that your senses are always providing you with far more information than you could ever process at once, which is why your mind filters out anything that it doesn't consider relevant. It does this for a reason. Analysis paralysis is a

very real condition whereby a person faced with too many options often ends up doing nothing at all.

Unfortunately, notifications are designed in such a way that they trigger a desire to interact with them, making it difficult for the brain to filter out their power without practice. Creating a routine that maximizes your personal goals while ensuring that distractions like these notifications come second is a surefire way to retrain your brain and free up time for more productive, focused, and creative pursuits.

Rethink the process: As most people won't have the luxury of ignoring many of these notifications indefinitely, the trick is to reconsider the way you work for maximum success. While it might be hard to believe, if you are having issues then you also have the tools you need to minimize the issue, if not mitigate it completely. While the mundane drudgery of the day to day may make it difficult to remember from time to time, the simple truth is that your mental and physical energy are ultimately yours and yours alone to use as you see fit. You can give in to reactionary thinking or you can take a real look at your daily routines and see what can be done to improve those that exist and create them in areas of your life that are lacking.

To do so, the following chapters will provide you with a guide to analyze the things you do throughout your day, with an eye towards trimming the fat in hopes of freeing up the time you need to reach for whatever it is that matters most. The first five chapters will walk you through a step-by-step process designed to help you see just where the flaws in your current routines are, where they can be fixed, and where you would be better off just scrapping them entirely. It is also important to keep in mind that you may find some aspects of certain steps difficult to work through, but you must power through. That difficulty is often a sign of the types of restricted thinking the steps are designed to break through.

The second portion of the book is comprised of a number of chapters dedicated to different ways to help you maximize the new habits that you are creating. You will first learn to improve your positivity and bolster your creativity and productivity at the same time. You will then find two chapters dedicated to helping you understand the importance of mindfulness as well

as a bevy of ways you can practice it in your own life to ensure that you are never too busy for its many benefits.

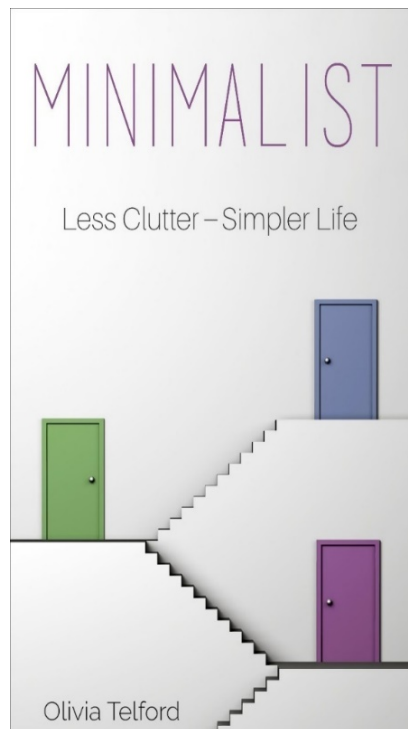
From there you will find tips and tricks for improving your emotional intelligence, which is sure to naturally boost your creativity and help you understand any personal roadblocks that may be in your way. Next, you will learn easy ways to improve your confidence, which is sure to help you cut through the red tape in certain aspects of your life that are separating you from true happiness. Finally, you will find a discussion of minimalism and how the things you surround yourself with may actually be holding you back from reaching your full potential by making it more difficult than it needs to be to keep your routines intact.

With so many choices out there when it comes to consuming this type of content, it is appreciated that you've chosen this one. Plenty of care and effort went into ensuring it contains as many interesting and useful tidbits as possible, please enjoy!

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CHAPTER 1: KNOW YOURSELF

If you ever hope to build a successful routine, improve your focus, expand your creativity, or meet any goal you set your mind to, the first step towards success is to understand just what you are currently working with. While self-reflection can be difficult for some people, it is a non-negotiable part of the process, as it will ultimately help you set the type of realistic goals that lead to positive long-term personal change.



Look yourself in the mirror: This exercise is particularly useful, especially for those with preexisting body image issues, though it does require a full-length mirror to perform properly. To begin this exercise, start by disrobing completely and standing in front of the mirror without the benefit of soft lighting or any other visual filters. Many people are uncomfortable looking at specific parts of their body, which is relatively common and doesn't affect overall levels of self-confidence directly. Where it does affect self-confidence, however, is if you let a specific part of your appearance linger

in a negative light for so long that it loses realistic perspective and instead takes on a far greater importance than it ultimately deserves.

If you find a part of your body particularly difficult to face, take the time, while facing the mirror, to really look at the trouble area. Not as you see it when you think of a mental image of yourself, but as it exists in the real world. You still don't have to like every facet of yourself, but you should have a more realistic idea of what the flaw entails. You can also use this time to begin forming a plan for improvement moving forward. Few things will improve your self-confidence more than conquering a lingering doubt about yourself once and for all.

If you feel a lack of confidence in yourself specifically related to your appearance, then one of the most important steps you can take is improving your appearance. The old saying, clothes make the person, is an exaggeration, but only just. While others are likely to never notice the way you look as much as you do, the importance of wearing clothes that fit well and that you think look good on you cannot be overstated. The right clothes can be thought of as armor; put yours on and you will feel invincible. This feeling will then naturally present itself to others as self-confidence.

Know the reason you're doing something: It's easy to break a habit if you don't have a personal reason to keep doing it. It's imperative that you make a habit of doing things with a purpose in mind to keep you motivated and enthusiastic.

To keep your spirits high, consider what got you interested in the activity in the first place. If you want to run in the morning, understand what that means for you: you'll be in better shape, you'll wake up earlier, and you'll have more energy throughout the day. Those are specifically biological side effects of running every day and work to inspire you to keep doing it. Your specific reason doesn't have to be so based in science, though. Maybe you want to eat healthier because a friend needs to eat better for their health, or maybe you just want to be able to fit into the tuxedo or dress of your dreams for your wedding. Whatever your reason, keep it in mind as you work on your habit to keep you working toward your goal.

Here's a fun tip that a lot of people tend to shy away from: your reason is yours alone, so make it as selfish as you want. You don't need an altruistic

reason to start being healthier, so find your reason for becoming healthier and stick to it. (It's also not a sin to want to be healthier for the sake of being healthier. It's as good a reason as any.)

Don't make excuses: On the flip side to having a reason for sticking to a habit, bad habits often have an excuse attached to keep you doing it. You may tell yourself, "Picking up fast food on the way home from work or school is easier and I'm too tired to cook." That's a fair point. It is easier to pick up fast food when you're driving home, but that doesn't make it a good reason.

Often times bad habits form from a lack of a good habit. If you make it a habit to come home from work or school every day and make a meal for yourself, it will seem less and less like a chore and more and more like a fun part of your daily routine.

The tricky part of the reason-excuse dynamic is that sometimes it can be difficult to decide if your habit is backed by a good reason or a silly excuse. That's why it's important to always stay mindful of your decisions. Really consider your habits and think about why you're doing them rather than something else. You can easily rationalize fast food's ease and lack of time commitment, but that doesn't make it a good reason. In this case, the health detriments outweigh the benefits of saving half an hour to make dinner.

Decide on which habits to keep and keep them: Once you've thought long and hard about your habit and decided it was worth continuing, you then need to do just that: continue with it. There will be days you want to skip a habit (no running on rainy days is probably a decent excuse), but that shouldn't mean you get to sleep in.

What most people don't consider is that oftentimes healthy habits tend to overlap. If one of your habits is running in the morning, then chances are another habit is waking up early. If one day, you decide to not run for whatever reason and sleep in, you're breaking two of your habits with one fell swoop. While this isn't the worst thing to do every once in a while, doing this continually will lead to both of these habits falling out at the same time.

If you must skip one habit every now and again, make sure to keep up with your other habits to prevent yourself from breaking multiple healthy habits. If you do decide that today is not the day to wake up early and run, wake up at your normal time and consciously decide on another activity to fill that space (read, clean, spend extra time cooking a nice breakfast, etc.).

Understanding personal patterns

Before you can begin making positive life changes, you need to understand the patterns that you are regularly repeating and how they affect your day-to-day experiences. The best way to do this is to practice. Pattern recognition is a skill, which means practicing is the only way you will ever find it easier to manage. If you aren't sure how to start, consider the following tips.

Start by seeing the patterns around you: If you find you have a hard time seeing your own personal patterns, instead turn your attention to the world around you and look for the patterns in everything you see. The more patterns you identify, the easier it will be to identify additional patterns in the future. You will eventually be able to start noticing patterns in the people around you as well. Once you are proficient in seeing the patterns in the world at large, identifying your own patterns should seem much more manageable.

Once you have found the correct pattern identifying mindset, you will find that it is easier for you to determine how each of these patterns contributes to the success or failure of the person or thing exhibiting them. Turn this intuition inward and think about your daily trials and tribulations and how your patterns affect them. While it can be difficult to look at your life from an analytical perspective, it is a crucial skill to develop as it is the only way you will ever encounter real change.

Consider your personal patterns: When you take note of a new pattern, you should also get in the habit of asking yourself if it is likely to help you in your goal towards empowerment or if it is more likely to hurt you. If it is a positive pattern, you might want to consider integrating it into your daily life. If it is negative, you will need to consider how you can successfully avoid it so that it does not cause you any hardship in the future. Thinking about the deeper connection and purpose to the patterns you see will make it easier to understand even more complex patterns in the future, eventually allowing you to see what patterns are preventing your empowerment.

If you feel as though you aren't seeing too many patterns at first, you may find it helpful to start by thinking about all of the things that happen like clockwork in your daily experience. From there you will want to consider

why each happens in the way that it does. You will want to think about the cause and effect for each, and if you find that you don't have all the information to accurately determine both, you are going to want to puzzle things through until you have all the relevant details. You don't need to worry about making sense of everything right away, simply noticing that these patterns are occurring is already a huge step in the right direction.

Organizing the patterns you have perceived: Once you begin to notice your personal patterns and how they relate to the patterns of the world at large, start looking at the patterns and determine how they fit together in a logical fashion. You may find it helpful to group related patterns together. Although you should avoid grouping things together purely for simplicities sake, as relating unrelated patterns could easily skew your data. Additionally, when looking at the big picture it is completely normal to realize that you missed something the first time around and feel the need to go back and do additional research.

CHAPTER 2: SET THE RIGHT GOALS

Now that you have an idea of what you are working towards, it is time to set the right goals to help you get to where you need to be. When it comes to getting started, biting off more than you can chew can be a surefire recipe for disaster. Likewise, starting off too slowly will only ensure that you never really accomplish much of anything. Instead, you should set firm goals that you are fairly confident you can meet as long as you give it your all. In order to set the right type of goals, make sure the ones you choose are SMART.



SMART, in this case, stands for Straightforward, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely. The first SMART goal that you set should be one that is straightforward enough to more or less ensure your success while at the same time be relevant enough to your day-to-day life that actually succeeding will be a moment that you can easily recall in the future when success on a future goal is not nearly so assured. You will start forming the right type of neural pathways as soon as possible, which will then form into

patterns that will eventually become habits. With this in mind, start off with a goal that is at least tangentially connected to the negative pattern that you are the most anxious to start to change. You don't need to have an exact goal in mind at this point, just the start of an idea that you can build into something larger later on. Consider the following to ensure that you are on the right track.

SMART goals are specific: The best goals are the ones that you will always be able to clearly determine where you stand in relation to the goal. The goal should then have a clearly defined fail state as well as state that will clearly let you know when you have crossed the finish line. Specific goals are also going to be much easier to chart out over time, as their specificity will lend to clear sub-goals that can be linked to their success or failure.

When you choose a specific goal, you want to have a clear idea of the following details to ensure your goal is truly specific enough for your needs.

- Who you will need to work with in order to make the goal a reality
- What you will need to do to get started on completing the goal
- Where you will need to go to see the goal through to completion
- Why you wanted to get started completing the goal in the first place
- When you can realistically expect the goal to be completed
- How you will go about completing the goal in various steps

Measurable: A measurable goal makes it easy to determine precise metrics for success, progress or failure. Keeping goals measurable will help you work through them at a steady pace rather than in fits and starts. If you are having a hard time making your goals measurable, try considering how many or how much of something might indicate success or failure.

Likewise, starting from the end and working backward may be easier. Consider how you will know the goal has been successfully completed, and then work towards the beginning to make measuring goals easier.

Attainable: SMART goals are those that are attainable given a realistic amount of effort. When it comes to social anxiety, your goal shouldn't be to put yourself in a situation where a large group is going to be focused

exclusively on you at first, as that is asking too much of yourself. A better choice would be to set a goal such as having a conversation with five strangers in a week. In addition to not picking something too difficult, it is important that you don't lean too far in the other direction. Don't pick something that you can do without any real effort. Goals that are too easily attainable won't do anything to improve your social anxiety overall.

Relevant to your current situation: It is important that the goal you choose is relevant to your current situation as well as being simply something that is attainable with only a reasonable amount of effort. Relevance is key to turning the SMART goal system from a one-time thing into a pattern, and eventually a life-long habit, that you can rely on to help you meet the challenges of life no matter what they may be. Remember, you want these early goals to be as meaningful as possible so that you think back on them regularly and fortify the neural pathways as quickly as possible so they become your brain's default way of acting.

For example, if you set a goal of going to the gym four times each week and then manage to lose twenty pounds with that goal in mind, your brain will make that connection and form new neural pathways. If your level of athleticism or your general weight weren't the issues you were addressing, then no new neural pathways will be formed and you risk falling back on negative habits. When it comes to completing your first goal successfully, you may find it helpful to break it down into more manageable chunks to start before adding a piece of each chunk to the list of things you need to do each day.

Timely: Every good goal has a specific timetable that ensures it will be completed at a reasonable rate. This timetable is important, as without it the goal will never have the urgency it needs to get you up off the couch and working towards success. An end date makes a goal tangible and ensures you can count on your team to make it a priority when it matters most.

Get organized

Once you have your goals in mind, take stock of where you are in relation to where you want to be and getting organized will help set you on the right path to making your goals a reality.

Create a to-do list: When adding things to the list, the most important thing to remember is to be realistic—there are only so many hours in the day. An overflowing to-do list is a good way to create artificial stress, and it can lead to analysis paralysis, the feeling of being unable to choose one option after being presented with too many options. Effectively efficient individuals know that trying to fit too many items onto a single day's to-do list is a recipe for disaster.

Avoid multitasking: With so many interactive devices at your fingertips at all times, it is not surprising that your first instinct is always to multitask. In fact, the odds are better than average that you are doing at least one other thing right now while reading this book. In order to be as productive as possible, you need to break this habit, or at least control it.

The word multitasking as it is commonly used is actually a misnomer. Multitasking really amounts to no more than rapidly switching back and forth between tasks until one is finished. While this is fine for passive activities, like watching television or browsing the internet, you will find you finish many tasks much more quickly by focusing all your attention on the task at hand. It turns out that multitasking actually makes it more difficult for your brain to focus on any one task, and it can take 30 minutes or more to recover full focus on a single task after switching. Building a continual rhythm allows the brain to build stronger connections between concepts, which means topics will be easier to recall when you need to remember what it is you were just doing.

If you find yourself unable to resist the siren call of your favorite websites, don't despair just yet. While building up your willpower will help you be more productive in the future, there are a number of apps that temporarily block a set list of sites based on your specifications. Think of them as a safety net and have them ready in case of emergencies.

Order your tasks big to small: You might feel more accomplished if you finish several small tasks first, but it's best to save the easiest work for last. Large projects can be daunting to begin, but they are even more imposing when you are already partially drained from your previous endeavors. While having several smaller tasks still looming after you have finished a large project is certainly no fun either, at least they are individually more manageable. What's more, finishing the larger task will instill you with a boost of motivation from the reward centers of the brain, which will help you coast through your remaining work.

Work in chunks: For extremely unpleasant tasks, those that make you want to pull your hair out in frustration, it can be helpful to work in 30-minute chunks. While the thought of tackling the full task head-on can be discouraging enough to encourage putting it off indefinitely, working in small increments tricks the brain into seeing the task as more manageable. However, if you feel as though you have hit your stride on the task, it can be more beneficial to power through rather than having to work to get back into the proper mindset after a break.

Find an organizational system that works for you: The most important thing about any organizational system is that it should always be thought of as a work in progress. What works wonderfully for you at the beginning of the year could well become a useless slog halfway through. It is important to not fall back into disorganization, as it is much more difficult to start completely fresh than it is to transition from one organizational system to another.

Keep an up-to-date calendar: Keep a calendar and a place where you record upcoming events (not physical ones). It is important to get in the habit of keeping a calendar and checking it every day at least twice, once in the morning and again in the evening. Keep a list of new events to add to the calendar and add them to the calendar the next time you check it. This is a simple suggestion, but it will save you immeasurable headaches if followed regularly. Getting into the habit of always being aware of your calendar will ensure that you never have to worry about due dates or missed activities.

Be confident enough to burn your ship

If the time of your first goal's completion is at hand and you aren't quite sure if you will have the guts to go through with it, just remember Cortez and what he did to his ships in the 1500s on the shores of South America. Cortez and his men had just made landfall after months at sea, and instead of finding a land free of inhabitants, or at least inhabitants willing to accept Spanish rule, they found a land full of those willing to fight to keep what belonged to them. Cortez knew that his men were not looking forward to the coming conflict, so he did the only thing he could do to get their morale to where it needed to be. He burned their only way home.

Cortez ordered all of his men ashore before lighting their ships on fire and swimming to meet his men while they watched the show. Now understanding that they had no choice but to succeed, his men fought as hard as they could to subjugate the locals. Despite his extreme methods, Cortez had one thing right: if you take the time to put yourself into a situation where you have no choice to succeed, then you will have no choice but to go for it. Take a chance on yourself, burn your ships.

CHAPTER 3: FIND SOME FREE TIME

Setting new goals is a great step towards improving yourself for the better. However, if you are like most people, you don't exactly have a ton of extra time just lying around. As such, this chapter will look at things you can do to give yourself the time you need to work on improving yourself once and for all.



Consider meal prep

Planning and preparing your meals ahead of time is the key to success when it comes to freeing up as much time in your week as possible for more productive pursuits. Simply put, meal prepping helps you save time, money, and makes knowing what to eat and eating it a lot easier.

When do you typically eat unhealthy foods? For most people, the unhealthy choices come when you are super busy and just want to pick something up quickly and without much thought. Meal prep takes the question of what to eat and the need to have something quick out of the equation. What you're left with is a healthy meal that is ready to eat. It doesn't require much thought—just to grab a container from the fridge, heat it up, and eat it.

When you meal plan and prep, you never have to think about what to eat or worry about impulse buying food, and you'll always have food on hand when you're hungry. These things make sticking to an otherwise tricky diet a lot easier. It also reinforces the age-old idea that food is fuel and we should eat to live instead of live to eat.

Meal prep on the surface seems like it will take a lot of time, but in reality, it saves time. When you pre-cook everything, the only work you need to do during the week is re-heating. It should only take you 1-2 hours one day per week to have food for the entire week. Compare that to a regular night of cooking—about an hour, so seven hours of cooking a week—and you'll see that you're saving a ton of time.

By meal planning, you can ensure that you find all sorts of delicious recipes that fit your specific dietary needs. This keeps you from needing to rely on the same old breakfasts, lunches, and dinners week after week. You can always change up your meal plan or completely revamp it if you want something new. With meal planning, the sky is the limit!

Here are several different ways to meal prep:

You can make full meals. There are two ways to do this. You can cook the full meal and put it together in one container, or you can separate them out. It's your choice.

Batch cooking for freezing. This one is perfect if you really don't enjoy cooking and want to have as little hassle as possible. You can freeze things

like meats, soups, and veggies. Just make sure you understand how to properly thaw these things.

Ingredient prep. This is good for someone who doesn't mind a little extra work and wants a bit more variety. It involves prepping and cooking a lot of different ingredients such as zucchini noodles, hard boiled eggs, roasted veggies, and such and making different combinations of them over the week.

Or, you can do a mix of all three. It will really depend on your lifestyle. For some people, it will just be easier to throw everything in the freezer. For people who work a lot, it will be a lot easier to have their meals portioned out into separate containers so they can just grab and go. It's really just up to you.

You also have to remember how long your food is going to last in the fridge. This depends on a variety of things including the quality of your fridge, how you package your food, and of course, how old your food is. Keep in mind, some foods just don't age as well as others. For example, cooked meat, roasted vegetables, raw vegetables, sauces, nuts, and soups generally age well in the fridge. But, soft veggies, not so much. Just remember to use your common sense. If you really want to check, the FDA guidelines is a good place to start.

Most food lasts about 3 to 5 days, so you should probably schedule one or two days that will be yours for meal prepping. Scheduling it in advance will hold you accountable week to week. It may take a couple tries to really get the hang of it and feel as if you're doing this right.

Store food properly: Many recipes are able to be stored either on the counter, fridge, or freezer to be easily eaten when the hunger pangs strike. You will need to acquire some stock in Ziplock bags and lidded tubs to make sure you are able to store your leftovers and make-ahead meals properly.

Also, if you are really serious and do not have a lot of storage space, consider purchasing a FoodSaver. It is a small expense up front, but you will be able to pack more food into the space you have, your meals and snacks will stay fresher longer, and it minimizes the risk of freezer burn.

The FoodSaver works by simply sucking out all the air in your Ziplock bags, creating the space that you need.

As for any meats or vegetables that you store in the refrigerator or freezer, make sure that you label with the item name and date that you packed the leftovers. This will eliminate any guesswork as to when they actually were stored so you do not thaw out food that has gone bad.

If you are going to store your snacks on the counter, keep them in an air-tight container, as they will keep longer. Storing your meals in the freezer or the refrigerator is just as easy. Simply put them in a sealed container or a zip lock plastic bag. If you are storing them in the freezer, be sure to put them in a freezer safe container or Ziplock bag. Also, remove any excess air before you seal the bag. Ensure your meals and snacks are cooled completely beforehand. This will prevent moisture from creating condensation in your storage containers and bags, keeping your meals fresher.

Make it a party: Meal prep doesn't have to be a solo affair. Invite a friend over and double your recipes and you'll both have food for the week. Choose your recipes beforehand to make sure you're cooking food you both like. If you're cooking for your family, include your partner or children. Cooking with kids teaches them a valuable skill and will have the added benefit of familiarizing them with new ingredients, which can make them more likely to eat their vegetables!

Many food preparation activities are child-friendly or can be made child-friendly. For example, peeling vegetables and forming meatballs are fun and easy tasks. Consider setting up a chopping station for your younger children and give them a butter knife for cutting soft vegetables like potatoes and zucchini, or safety scissors for snipping herbs.

Another idea to make meal prep a social event is to have a food exchange. Send your friends and family this eBook and set a date for your frozen potluck. Perhaps you might also email the group in advance and ask them what their favorite meals are, to make sure the individual recipes have wide appeal. You might also choose a theme, like a winter soup or casserole exchange. Everyone should prepare a family-sized portion of the chosen recipe in a quantity equaling the size of the group.

Keep it visible: To make sure that all the time and money you've put into shopping and preparing your food doesn't go to waste. It helps to catalog what's in your kitchen. Index both your fridge and your freezer, and, optimally, your pantry as well. Keep a list posted on the fridge door, on the wall, or in a notebook, inventorying the food you've so lovingly prepared.

Another tip is to keep your ingredients out when you get back from the store. This tip is for the procrastinators in particular. If you have a couple of days or hours in between your shop and prep time, seeing your cans of beans and bag of rice on the counter is a visual reminder and motivator for your meal prep. Having some of your ingredients out helps remove one small step from the task of cooking and gets you a little closer to starting your task.

Consider a passive income stream

These days many people have accepted the 40-hour work week as a way of life until they die. In reality, active income simply isn't enough for many people to cover their bills, let alone generate a level of wealth that actually leaves them comfortable. If this sounds like you, then the sooner you start multitasking your income streams, the better.

While setting up an income stream will require you to put in extra hours up front, with very little (if any) compensation, the amount that it ultimately brings in over time can more than make up for the amount of unpaid effort that goes into setting it up. Once you have 4 or 5 different passive streams set up, you will one day find that you don't even need to worry about your day job anymore. Utilizing passive income streams will never mean that you are free from any and all work, but it will mean that you will have to work much less on average than a person who makes as much as you do but generates it via active income.

Even better, in these increasingly uncertain economic times, knowing that you always have some passive income coming in can grant you the true security that comes from knowing you are financially sound, no matter what. While you may not be able to say goodbye to your current job right away, you will soon be amazed at how much less of a headache it is once you don't have to worry about it as your sole source of income. What's more, having your passive income backing you up might just be the push you need to get out there and find an active income stream you actually enjoy. Regardless of what it leads to, there is no doubt that having a passive income stream up and running is the first step to being the arbiter of your financial destiny.

Consider passive income

Create an online course: Did you know that you can create a digital product and sell it at a great price? Online courses have become very popular in the last couple of years. Many people are seeking ways to learn a course without spending years at university or college.

You will need some tools to get started. Check out websites such as www.google.com/slides/about/ for slide presentation software, www.screencast-o-matic.com for software that records your screen, and www.pixabay.com for completely free images to get you started. All these tools are very important if you are to prepare a good quality course that people will want to invest in.

Once your course is ready, review it to see how it is. You may also request a close friend or family member to help with the review and give you an honest opinion. If it has no errors that need fixing, then you can offer it to the public.

One of the most popular platforms for selling courses is Udemy. You can choose this platform to place your course and then let others know about it. Potential customers need to learn about the availability of the course.

Udemy has an entire database of students who frequently purchase courses they need. However, their database of students is not free, so any revenue that you generate will have to be shared. Even then, Udemy will let you take the lion's share of the revenue.

Udemy has plenty of other helpful resources that will make your course visible to more willing buyers. For instance, they have an affiliate marketing program that can help highlight your course to the general public. They also allow you to offer coupons and discounts to your customers.

You can also create your own website or blog and sell the course from there. This way, you get to keep 100% of any revenues you generate. However, there will be a very small number of interested buyers compared to www.udemy.com.

One of the best places to acquire your own blog is www.BlueHost.com. They have plenty of themes to choose from. If you are selling a course, you

should choose a course theme and then acquire some plug-ins to assist visitors with the course download.

Another website where you can sell your course to students and other interested learners is www.sellfy.com. It is another popular site where people sign up to sell digital products online. Signing up is free, and you get access to hundreds of potential buyers.

You must promote and market your course to potential buyers. Remember that you just created a course and the world is unaware of it. Letting people know about it is very important.

You can also market the course through a blogging website. Simply create a blog and use SEO marketing to market the course. Blogging is a great marketing tactic that will bring more readers and interested people to your blog. You can then direct them to where your course is so they can purchase and download it.

You may also want to consider using search engines such as Google and ad banners. There are plenty of digital marketing tools available including PPC or pay per click and so on. Make use of these tools to help people find your course.

Sell stock photos: If you are a passionate photographer and have good quality photos, then you can sell these online. There are thousands upon thousands of customers looking to purchase your photos and are willing to pay good money for them.

Stock photos are used for many different purposes, including personal and business websites, for promotional, marketing, and advertising purposes, and as background images in many different applications.

Stock photography is offering quality photos that can be registered and licensed, and then sold for a profit. A person wishing to deal in stock photography sales needs to have a portfolio of photographs in a given niche. These photos are then posted on an online platform where they can be viewed. Interested buyers will then view the photos and purchase the ones they want.

Customers can locate the stock photos that they need by using keywords and categories. They then get to browse through the photos and pick the

ones they like. This has many advantages—they do not have to pay a photographer to take the photos or have to travel to specific locations to take the photos themselves.

The stock photography industry, on the other hand, provides photographers, both amateur and professional, a platform to display their photos and make some money in the process. But first, you need to have the photos.

The starting point of your stock photography career or side gig is a good camera. There are plenty of good quality cameras on the market, and you need to find an affordable one that takes great photos. One that is highly recommended is the digital SLR.

A high-end digital compact camera such as Panasonic Lumix is a great camera. You can use others as well, including Canon and Nikon SLR cameras. You can check them out online. Some of the most popular digital cameras can also be found on any stock photography website.

You will also require good quality photo editing software—one of the best on the market is Adobe Photoshop, a powerful application program that can help you edit, adjust, and otherwise alter the photos to improve appearance.

You are now ready to start taking photographs of whatever it is you like. The best scenario is focusing on a preferred niche. Try to get as many good quality images as you can. You can set a goal for yourself, such as taking 100 images each week. These are good quality images that can be used in different applications.

Remember that your final images must be clear, colorful, and unique. Also, try to ensure that your images are high-key, meaning they are the main subject and the background is predominantly white. This ensures that whoever buys the photos is easily able to use them for any purposes they want without the need to edit the background.

You are now ready to sell your photos on stock photography websites. Each stock photography website has its own rules, and anyone hoping to sell their photos must subscribe to. Most of the time, the images will be examined for things such as copyright violation, which may mean some of your photos will not get accepted on some of the sites.

In the event that your sample photos and images are not approved, do not despair. You can follow any changes recommended and possibly try again after 30 days. Most editors will critic your photos, so follow their suggestions.

Once customers love your images and wish to purchase the rights to use them, then you will get paid. Different stock photography websites have different requirements. Most of them offer their subscribers multiple ways of getting paid, including by check, bank draft, or wire transfer.

CHAPTER 4: CHANGE YOUR MINDSET

Why are some people able to excel at anything they put their minds to while others can't ever seem to get off the ground despite obviously possessing equal or greater skill? The answer is simple. Studies have shown that it is at least as important, if not more so, to believe you have the ability to do something as it is to actually have that ability.



In fact, there are two distinct ways to view the idea of intelligence or ability. They can be seen as things that are innate, which means what we are born with is all we ever get, or they can be seen as skills that can be gained through effort and lots of hard work. These two different viewpoints, in turn, lead to drastically different behaviors, which over time lead to drastically different results. If you head out into the world each day with the idea that you can improve and succeed at whatever you attempt, then you will find that success starts coming easier to you over time. This is what is referred to as a growth mindset and it is one of the main distinguishing characteristics of successful people.

As children, some people are told they excel in certain subjects while others are told that they succeeded because they tried hard and that effort leads to success. The first group of children can be expected to develop a fixed mindset, whereby their brains become more active when they are being told how well they have done. The second group of children can be said to have a growth mindset, wherein their minds are the most active when they are learning what they could do better next time. Those with a fixed mindset tend to worry more about how they are seen by others than what they are actually learning, which is why those with a growth mindset tend to be more successful in the long run.

An easy way to understand the differences in motivation between the two mindsets is through the parable of the tortoise and the hare. Everyone always told the hare how amazingly quick he was, which led him to develop a fixed mindset that reinforced the idea that he was the fastest no matter what. This, in turn, led him to believe that he could nap during the race and still win easily. The tortoise, meanwhile, had a growth mindset, which allowed him to understand that perseverance leads to true success. This belief allowed him to power through and come out the victor in the race.

The two mindsets diverge the most when it comes to the way they allow people to deal with setbacks in their lives. Fixed mindset individuals tend to suffer more from setbacks as they shake the foundational belief they have in their talents. This then leads them to give up more easily because they can tell themselves that whatever the task at hand is, it is simply not something they are naturally good at. On the contrary, every obstacle that a growth mindset individual has is simply seen as an opportunity for further growth, allowing them to try new ways to solve the crisis at hand while simultaneously learning and growing from the process.

Fixed Mindset

- Wants to look smart or competent regardless of the reality
- Quick to avoid challenges
- Easily thwarted by obstacles
- Thinks effort is “pointless”

- Ignores feedback
- Can feel threatened by the success of others

Growth Mindset

- More interested in long-term results
- Enjoys a challenge
- Learns from obstacles
- Equates effort with success
- Appreciates criticism
- Finds inspiration in the success of others

Maximize your neuroplasticity

With the consequences of having a fixed mindset so potentially disastrous, especially if you are striving to find the inner strength to empower yourself to improve your lot in life, it is important to do what you can to break these negative mental habits as quickly as possible. Luckily, the human brain has the ability to constantly reshape itself throughout the course of its lifetime, which means that it is never too late to shift into a growth mindset, no matter how deeply rooted the fixed mindset principles might be. New neural pathways in the brain can be formed as new thoughts are repeated time and again, and once they become well-worn paths, then new habits are formed.

This means that it will be much more difficult to change the habits that are already deeply ingrained, such as those that involve mentally keeping yourself from reaching an empowered state. While changing from a fixed to a growth mindset will be difficult, the tips outlined below will make the process more manageable than it might otherwise be.

In order to go from a fixed to a growth mindset, the first thing that you should do is take an analytical look at your life and see which habits you currently take for granted are enabling this destructive mindset to perpetuate itself. Once you have really looked at how you act on a daily basis, it will be much easier to determine how you can counteract them for the better. The easiest way to get started is through a dedicated diet of repetition.

There is a reason repetition is so commonly used in advertising and political messages—it is known to have a measurable influence on those who hear it. In fact, studies have shown that something as simple as hearing a phrase once every 20 seconds for 1 minute can directly influence the way you feel about a specific topic. While it may seem too easy to be true, the fact of the matter is, your brain factors in the number of repetitions when it comes to deciding if the information is valid or not.

After your brain takes in new information that it believes might be true, it goes to work assessing the overall level of truth of the statement in question. If it has nothing else to go on, the number of times it has heard the information and how easy the information is to understand go a long way

towards convincing it the information is true. While the fact that your neural programming is so simplistic might seem disconcerting at first, the truth is you can use these basics to your advantage by essentially tricking your brain into adopting a new and improved mindset.

While you are struggling to switch your mindset filter from fixed to growth, it may be difficult to try to change certain negative habits that you have identified as a major hindrance in your goal of self-improvement. Repeating a mantra or affirmation regularly can allow it to penetrate the filter without having to wait for it to change on its own. An affirmation is any positive sentence that you take the time to write down multiple times per day, and a mantra is essentially the same thing, but the sentence is repeated aloud or mentally multiple times each day.

You have the power to create your reality and improve your situation today. You can't doubt what you want. When you doubt, you are creating resistance. Any resistance will prevent you from achieving what you desire. You cannot have doubt or fear in your life. This will help you break the resistance. Your conscious and unconscious mind will work together to stop the resistance and fear. You will attract what you need to attract so you may reach your goals.

It is important to use some affirmations daily to reach your goals. Positive vibration feels much stronger than negative vibrations. Your affirmations must make you feel better. The most important rule is that your vibrations have to make you feel good and you state them with emotion. It is important to always state I AM!

1. I am strong.
2. I am confident.
3. I am acting on inspiration.
4. I am giving good things to people.
5. I am receiving abundance.
6. I am improving my belief system.
7. I am striving to raise my vibrations.
8. I am contributing to the world.

9. I am the creator of my days, months, and years.

10. I am worthy of success and love.

Commit yourself to the task in front of you: Your mindset is one of the most deeply rooted patterns that your brain has gotten used to following through on over the years. If you ever want to empower yourself and improve, you need to dedicate yourself to the process. It is important to keep in mind that this will be a marathon, not a sprint, and to set your expectations accordingly.

Don't forget, it takes about a month to form a new habit and looking at things with a growth mindset can be seen as a habit just like any other. Keep up the good work and you will break through your resistance before you know it. While it will be hard in the moment, always remember that any internal resistance you feel is just your mind resisting the change, which is it essentially telling you to keep up the good work.

Begin with something simple: When it comes to creating new neural pathways, one of the best ways to do so is by seeing a noticeable result from an action that you consciously took in an effort to change your mindset. While a single positive choice or two a day won't generate noticeable results on their own, their cumulative effect can be substantial, and that tipping point can occur sooner than you might think.

Take a mental inventory at the end of each day: If you find that you are having difficulty keeping up a steady stream of growth mindset choices throughout the day, you may want to start keeping a log of the events that happen to you each day as well as the various things that go through your head at each juncture. Once your day is broken down in this way, it will be much easier to make note of any fixed mindset thoughts that stick out to you so that you can more effectively guard against them when you hear from them again.

CHAPTER 5: BUILD NEW HABITS

Habits aren't formed after only one or two days. For the first few weeks, you're going to have to force yourself to do whatever you want to make into a habit. On most of those days, you probably will hate it, but it gets easier after that first struggle.



On average, it takes about 21 days for an individual task to become a habit. That's three weeks of doing something that, honestly, you probably won't enjoy too much to reach a point where you can stand it. It's hard and can suck, but if you remind yourself of your reasons for doing it and stick to the schedule, you'll get to the point where you can't live without your habit.

Once you form a habit over those three weeks of pushing yourself, you may not fully appreciate how easy the task becomes. You may still hate running in the morning because of how hard it can be to wake up early. But once you get a habit locked in place, you won't be able to go a day or two without it without feeling the negative effects of not doing it.

It comes down to one thing to form a habit: tenacity. It's all about pushing yourself to continue a task even when it's difficult to make it a habit in your everyday life. The following tips and tricks are designed specifically to make being tenacious easier and, therefore, making forming and keeping habits easier.

Eat better

While exercise is a great way to stay fit and keep your weight down, your eating habits dictate how much weight you gain or lose over long periods of time. Similar to your exercising habits, healthy eating habits won't affect you or your health immediately. Rather, they will take time to show any lasting results. Like all habits, these take time to develop as a part of your normal routine.

Eating habits are similar to exercising habits in many ways, but they must be approached differently because how you interact with food and eating said food is inherently different than how you interact with exercise on a day-to-day basis.

Know how to change your habits safely: Dieting or even minor changes to your eating habits on a daily basis have the chance to be problematic in the long run if you don't know what you're doing. That's why it's essential you consider your lifestyle before changing your habits.

Eating too little (especially while adjusting your exercise routine) can cause you to suffer from a lack of daily calorie intake, while eating too much or not enough variety can lead to health issues later on.

Keep a log of foods you've eaten: A big mistake people often make is not keeping track of what they put in their bodies. It's easy to say, "I'll have just one burger," when you aren't sure the last time you had one. Keeping track of your daily intake of food allows you to monitor how healthy or unhealthy your food choices are over time as well as keeping track of variety, or a lack thereof, in your meal choices.

Like exercising, there are tons of apps and services out there that will keep track of your daily food intake... kind of. If you're willing to put in the food you eat day-to-day (and where you got the food if it's fast food), then many apps and services will fill in the rest for you.

Plan meals in advance: It's easy to make an excuse for fast food when you don't have dinner planned at home. If you begin each week planning the meals you want to eat each day or, if you want to go above and beyond by preparing some of said meals, you'll have less of an excuse to swing by McDonald's on the way home.

Planning meals in advance also allows you to note what foods you eat, or plan on eating, regularly so you can make changes before you even begin buying the ingredients.

Finding fun and tasty recipes (that are also easy) can be tricky. Sure, there's the internet and cookbooks, which are both great sources, but those can take time and, like picking out a movie on Netflix, offer too many options to choose from.

In the back of this book, for your pleasure and ease of access, we've provided you five simple recipes that taste delicious. Whether you're making a meal for yourself or a group of friends, each recipe is worth trying out once (even if it's just to hone your skills in the kitchen).

Make a list and stick to it: When you're ready to stock up on your food for the following week, it's important to plan out every ingredient you'll need. Making a shopping list is an easy way to have all the ingredients in one place (whether it be on a post-it note or your cell phone). It also prevents you from picking up any unnecessary sweets while preparing your healthier meals.

Making a list goes perfectly with planning your meals. If you only give yourself time to visit the grocery store once a week, you better go in with a week of meals planned and a strict list of what you need for each meal. Each trip to the grocery store is filled with temptation (sweets, ice cream, extra pasta, easy frozen meals, etc.). Don't let these unnecessary foods get to you. Go to the grocery store when you need to and stick to your list.

Change it up: Eat a variety of foods to keep your body balanced and healthy. While many people enjoy meat enough to have it at every meal, make sure to mix in fruits and vegetables to add balance and variety.

That doesn't mean you can't eat the same kind of food for every meal. Say you like tacos but don't want to eat the same old tacos day after day. Mix it up with turkey tacos one day and vegan tacos the next. Have fun with your variation of food and spend time experimenting with the foods you're familiar with.

Know suitable substitutions: Because variety is so important to keeping meals balanced and healthy, it's important to know other sources for key

nutrients outside of the norm. For example, rather than relying on red meat to give you that boost of protein, look to beans for a different approach to receive the same nutrients. Beans, in this case, offer fiber as an added bonus to the protein you would be receiving from meat.

Know the benefits of food groups: Most people are familiar with the Food Pyramid, or what is now called “MyPlate.” Keeping the five basic food types in mind (fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins, and dairy—as well as fats and oils), you should learn what each food type has to offer in general nutrients and health benefits. Of course, not all fruits offer exactly the same thing, but each food group has general rules to guide your eating habits.

Exercise more

Most people attempt to fit in a few hours at the gym a few times a week to make sure they're getting the most for their time (and the most for their money, seeing as most gyms come with a pretty hefty fee). Obviously, this is a decent method for losing some weight and putting on some muscle, but that's a big commitment and simply isn't for everyone.

Another option is to simply follow a few daily habits to keep you healthier in general. Sure, you may not get to the point where you will be able to bench press several hundred pounds, but with these habits, you'll look and feel a lot healthier.

Small workouts will go a long way: Start your day with a dozen or so pushups or sit-ups, or a jog around the block. Each of these should take you less than ten minutes and will force your tired and achy body to kick into gear right away. Just exerting some effort in the wee hours of the morning (something as small as walking to your car, even) will get your body going and make the rest of your morning easier than you could ever imagine.

Don't limit exercise to a specific time of the day: Having an exercise schedule is important, but if you find yourself with a few minutes here or there, use the time to exercise. This doesn't mean running a marathon or lifting weights in your office. If you have 10 minutes left in your lunch hour, why not take a walk around the building? It might not be the most exciting activity, but just moving your body will help get rid of that post-lunch need for a nap as well as give you a chance to enjoy some fresh air.

Be conscious of your exercise: Many people simply count their steps throughout the day. Fitbits, Smartwatches, and a ton of phone apps can do this for you. Keeping track of your steps is a great way to get an overview of how much you're doing throughout the day. Most apps or products give you a nice little graph to show your progress over time so you can adjust accordingly.

Have a group to exercise with: Sure, setting goals for yourself to meet is fun and can keep you motivated, but five people all trying to meet the same goal can be even more so. The more people you exercise with, the more flexible you can make your goals. You can make exercise competitive or

cooperative to push the members in your group to exercise more and more. The more people participating, the more motivating it will be for each member to do their best.

Walk: That's it. Walk. Do you need to go to the store for a can of soup you forgot to pick up? Walk the mile to grab it. Sure, it may take longer, but you'll be getting in some nice exercise while enjoying some time outside. If you need to run errands or go to the store to pick up a few things, park a block away or at the back of the parking lot. Sure, it may not be a lot of extra exercise, but that extra two hundred steps can add up if you park farther away for many different errands.

Move more: Throughout the day, we do countless small tasks that are oftentimes boring and require very little thought. During these activities, make it a point to move your body more. Dance while you sweep the kitchen or jog instead of walking somewhere. You don't need to take longer with the task if you swing your hips in time with a song while you clean.

Find natural breaks in activities: You can work out so easily while watching TV or playing video games without missing a beat. During commercial breaks or loading screens for video games, fit in a few pushups, sit-ups, or jumping jacks. Your show or game won't be interrupted, and you'll be getting in a nice little workout here and there.

This also helps if you put in extra thought to what channel you want to watch or what video game you want to play. Some have longer commercial breaks or loading screens, meaning you can get in slightly longer workouts each time, which does add up.

Sleep better

Wake up early: The concept of someone being a natural morning person is a myth. All your friends and coworkers you hate before 10 am because of how chipper they are aren't naturally that happy in the morning. They've allowed their body to adjust to waking up earlier, which makes it easier for them to get up earlier.

The biggest key to changing your sleep schedule is not when you go to bed. You can go to bed at 7 pm to try to wake up earlier, but if your body is used to waking up at 9 am, it's going to try to wake up at 9 am. The most important variable is when you force yourself to wake up. If you set your alarm for 5:30 am in the morning, force yourself to get out of bed at 5:30 am, and you'll find that in no time, you'll wake up around that time naturally.

Do not rely on coffee or caffeine: Too many people rely on caffeine to wake up in the morning. You know the types: "I haven't had my coffee yet, so I might yell at you." While some of them may be exaggerating a bit, many people have trained their body to not properly function without their daily dose (or five) of coffee.

While coffee and energy drinks are inherently negative, if you drink something with caffeine in it to start every single morning, your body loses its ability to create the proper chemicals to wake you up. Drinking coffee means the drink is doing the work for your body so it doesn't need to do it any longer. That means it won't even try to wake you up if the coffee will do it instead.

Get rid of daily naps: Naps feel great, but if they're longer than about half an hour, they can really mess up your sleep schedule for that night. Instead of crawling into bed right after work, try doing a light exercise to get your blood flowing again. You won't want to work out when you feel tired in the afternoon, but if you pull the strength to walk around the block, you'll feel wide awake and ready to take on the rest of the day.

Monitor your sleep habits: If you work out more, you'll notice better sleep at night with fewer interruptions throughout the night. It also works the

opposite way. If you notice that you may not have gotten great sleep over the last few nights, you should analyze your days and find a reason.

Get enough sleep: Sleep helps your mind recharge. You'll notice a huge difference in your day if you make sure to get enough sleep each night. The amount of sleep you need is based on your age, sex, and other variables that your doctor can tell you about. On the opposite side of the spectrum, getting too much sleep is almost as bad for you. If you sleep too much, too often, your body will adjust and assume it needs that much sleep to function. When that happens, you'll need that amount of sleep, meaning getting the proper amount of sleep will be too little for your body.

Destress

There are two main kinds of stress: acute stress and chronic stress. Acute stress is our bodies' short-term reaction to dangerous things, such as running into a bear in the woods. This type of stress is not the type that gets such a bad rap today, as it is actually a very useful response that gives us that surge of energy and strength that we need to protect ourselves in dangerous situations. Chronic stress, however, is where the problem lies. Chronic stress is when we experience that fight or flight response and the rush of hormones associated with it, but they do not turn themselves off after the stressors have passed.

Plan more: What makes a habit a habit is the fact that you do it constantly without thinking having to force yourself into starting it. The only way to do this is to create a daily (or weekly) schedule and to force yourself to stick to it. The more you stick to your schedule, the easier it will be for you to stick to your schedule.

With technology today, creating and sticking to a schedule has never been easier. Smartphones are perfect for creating a calendar with alarms to go off up to a day before your activity is planned, so you can have plenty of time to pump yourself up.

Some of the best advice I've ever been given is also the simplest in theory: Set an alarm for when you need to do something. When the alarm goes off, do the task without hesitation.

If you have an alarm set for your daily tasks (waking up, going to work, cleaning the kitchen, mowing the lawn, homework, the list is limitless) and do that task as soon as the alarm goes off, you'll have a much easier time creating habits and keeping them. Like all things, it's easy to make an excuse for not doing it at the time, but if you force yourself to get up and do whatever your alarm says to do, you won't have time to consider all of the countless excuses not to do it.

Tune out social media: In today's fast-paced society, we are constantly trying to achieve things and complete tasks on time, all the while questioning whether or not we will be accepted or adhere to the status quo of our peers and coworkers. This type of lifestyle places a heavy toll on our

bodies and induces chronic stress. When our stress response is perpetually turned on and our body is constantly releasing cortisol, epinephrine, and norepinephrine, the usefulness of this response becomes extremely detrimental to our overall health and well-being and is actually the underlying cause of many diseases and disorders that so many of us succumb to today. We were not made to function this way and have actually tricked our own biology in such a way that it is working against us, which is obviously unnatural. Keep the following lifestyle changes in mind to keep your chronic stress to a minimum.

One lifestyle change you can implement to cut down on your stress and worry is to take a break from social media. You can do this by literally ceasing to use social media for a predetermined number of days, or just set aside a time period of non-use each day. In today's society, we are constantly checking our smartphones and computers for the latest Facebook post or Instagram picture upload. There are several issues with this.

First of all, it is easy to become so zoned out on what is going on online that we lose focus on the task at hand as well as the plans we have for the day. You know as well as I do that a quick login to update your status can easily turn into an hour of mind-numbing scrolling. This will without a doubt cause you to fall behind on the things you need to accomplish and, you guessed it, increase stress. Second and most importantly, social media is basically a worldwide network of people comparing their lives to someone else's.

Take a break from this madness, stop trying to compare your life to the people you observe online. I can promise you, they are dealing with their own stressors and things they worry about, no one is immune. The only life you have control over is your own and that is more than enough. Whatever your situation is and whatever you are going through, use your time to reflect, improve on, and be thankful for the life you are given.

Be present: The next lifestyle change that anyone dealing with chronic stress and worry should implement is something that sounds so cliché because we hear it all the time, yet no one really grasps the concept, and that is to “be present.” This is such a simple piece of advice that carries so much weight when it comes to being stressed out and worried. In the times

we live in, life comes at us so fast. Remember being a child, when the world seemed so small and each day felt like it lasted forever?

Then we grow up, and the responsibilities pile on, a career, a family, taking care of our parents and grandparents, etc. It becomes so easy to get into a routine in which we just go through the motions of getting through each day, never taking any time to consider the actual tasks we are completing. I'll tell you straightforward that this is no way to go through your life. Consider this quote, "Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift, that is why it is called the present."

Moving forward, you should encourage yourself to dwell on that for a moment and think about what it is telling you. If you live your life in such a way that you are constantly dwelling on the past, wishing you could go back and change things that you have done or things that have happened to you, or you are constantly worrying about what is to come, then, of course, you are going to be stressed out!

You have zero control over things that have already happened to you. Would you like to know how you can ease your worry and stress about the future? Make the most out of the situation you are in right now, giving it everything you have and making sure you are doing it to the best of your ability. It makes sense that if you put forth your best every single day, completing all these small pieces of your life with grace and excellence that the big picture itself will be composed of all of these beautifully crafted small pictures.

Try yoga: The last lifestyle change that should be in anyone's stress and worry-fighting regimen is yoga. When most people think of yoga, they visualize bald men in flowing robes sitting Indian-style on a mountaintop, monotonously chanting. While there is absolutely nothing wrong with that if you prefer it, this extremity is not what we will discuss in this section. Yoga can be an extremely potent tool in your journey to reduce stress and eliminate unneeded worry from your life.

While yoga and meditation do share some common ground, yoga is more focused on maneuvering the body in certain poses that encourage tension release in various muscle groups, as well as increased blood flow throughout the body. This results in the similar euphoric feeling associated

with any form of exercise. Yoga is also proven to increase the amount of serotonin, the feel-good hormone we previously discussed, thereby boosting our overall mood and outlook on life.

As with meditation and exercise, yoga comes with a long list of health benefits aside from just reducing levels of stress and worry. In a yoga pose, the practitioner moves the various joints in the body through a full range of motion. This improves overall flexibility and reduces the risks of injury. Another benefit of moving the joints through their full range of motion in a yoga pose is that this brings a rush of blood and synovial fluid to all of the cartilage in the joint. With this comes the fresh nutrients required to repair, maintain, and strengthen the joint, thereby reducing the incidence of joint deterioration such as arthritis and osteoporosis.

Yoga is also known to increase the overall health of the cells by upping the amount of hemoglobin present in the blood, bringing more oxygen to each cell and improving their productivity. While implementing yoga into your schedule may require slightly more time than meditation or an exercise routine, there are indeed many stress fighting qualities associated with it if you can find the time.

If you are wondering just where you can find a yoga routine to begin, as most of us probably don't have the crouching lotus pose in the back of our minds, there is an abundance of information available online to assist you.

Focus on eating better: Let's discuss the most obvious method to reduce stress and worry that results from maintaining a balanced, quality diet. This is your physical appearance. I would venture to say that a huge percentage of the stress experienced in today's society comes from the way we look. If you do not feel like you are physically appealing to the people you come in contact with every day, your self-confidence is going to suffer because of it. However, if you are conscientious about your dietary choices, you are far more likely to look and feel in such a way that allows you to exude self-confidence and that vibrant personality that will give you an edge in whatever you are doing in life.

What if I told you that if you wanted to improve your overall mental health, reduce stress, and calm thoughts of worry that you needed to eat more chocolate? I am happy to report that you can actually benefit from

including it in your diet, dark chocolate in particular. Dark chocolate is bursting with antioxidants just like avocados and blueberries. However, it actually contains an even higher concentration of them. Eating chocolate is scientifically proven to increase mood-elevating neurotransmitters such as serotonin and endorphins in the brain. There are two ways in which this takes place, the first being the chemicals in chocolate actually signal the brain to release these neurotransmitters.

Likewise, eating chocolate is without a doubt a pleasant task for most people, and therefore the brain releases serotonin naturally. Studies show that consuming dark chocolate in moderation as a regular part of your diet is related to decreased cortisol levels. Chocolate is such a powerful stress reducer that even pregnant women who regularly eat dark chocolate during their pregnancies are proven to give birth to more stress-free babies!

Consuming dark chocolate on a regular basis is a good idea for your heart health as well. The nutrients found in chocolate actually decrease levels of LDL (the bad cholesterol) in the blood; this causes decreased the buildup of plaque in the veins and arteries and less obstructed blood flow. In addition to decreasing plaque buildup, eating dark chocolate can help your heart out in several other ways as well.

First, it contains chemicals that cause the blood to take longer to clot and also causes the veins to become more elastic. These heart-helping benefits present in chocolate will without a doubt help to lower your blood pressure, which is just what you need when chronically stressed and on the go.

You have probably already been utilizing the next dietary method of decreasing your stress and worry without even realizing it. When most people are sick, tired, or cold, one of the first things they turn to is a hot beverage. While it is true that many of the beverages we consume hot do contain chemicals and nutrients that alleviate stress from a physical standpoint, the effect I am talking about is strictly mental.

Since a cup of something hot such as tea, coffee, or cocoa is already associated with feelings of peace and comfort when we consume them, the brain notices this and responds similarly. A nice warm cup of your favorite drink will actually encourage your brain to release those feel good hormones such as dopamine and serotonin. There is a reason we are geared

toward these beverages during stressful events; as it turns out, your brain knows you even better than you do!

In conclusion, your diet is one of the most important thing to take in consideration when discussing stress reduction, decreasing worry, as well as physical and mental health in general. No matter how organized you become with your schedule, how often you make it a point to get the adequate amount of exercise and physical activity, if you chronically deny your body the proper nutrients that it needs to support you, you will not reap the majority and stress fighting and health benefits that come with everything else we have talked about.

CHAPTER 6: FIND YOUR POSITIVITY

Have you ever wondered what differentiates most happy, successful, and seemingly fortunate people from the struggling, unhappy, and so-called low on luck folks? The answer is quite obvious yet eludes us. Positive thinking is the key. It has the power to transform your entire life if you recognize its virtues and apply them in your day-to-day life. When you keep thinking and focusing on exactly what you want or how your life should be, you are in complete control of creating the life of your dreams. When we think good, constructive, and “can-do” thoughts, our brain releases endorphins, which leads to a greater feeling of well-being. This encourages us to be even more positive and driven.



You’ve heard a million times about seeing your glass as half full. Let us go a step ahead and add that the glass is refillable. The power to fill your glass is in your hands. You determine your destiny through the power of your thoughts and subconscious mind. Successful and happy people know how to harness the power of their thoughts to create a desired reality. They do

not rely excessively on factors such as luck, circumstances, and other people. They know that the power to manifest a life of their dreams lies within their thoughts.

There are truckloads of benefits for those willing to give positive thinking an honest chance. It may not be easy initially, especially if you haven't exactly had smooth sailing in life. However, once you make a sincere attempt to include positive thinking as a way of life, it becomes second nature. You will find yourself attracting more positivity, happiness, success, and gratifying relationships.

Positive thinking reduces stress and awards you glowing physical health. When you are happy and positive inside, it automatically reflects in your outer health. Positive thinking allows you to live a longer, healthier life. People will like you more when you display an encouraging, constructive, and optimistic demeanor. Positive thinking gives you a confident aura and sharper decision-making skills. There's just no end to the value a healthy dose of positive thinking can add to your life.

Consider how you speak to yourself: Everyone talks to themselves. Even if most people don't consider their inner monologue to be a back and forth conversation, the fact that for many people this self-talk has negative connotations cannot be ignored. The first step to understanding the effect that negative self-talk can have on your self-confidence levels is to take the time to notice when you are guilty of practicing it yourself.

To become more aware of when your thoughts take a negative turn, you will need to learn a little about mindfulness meditation. A core tenant of this type of meditation is interacting with thoughts while at the same time not engaging with them directly. What this means is that you need to get into the habit of taking stock of thoughts you are having so you can determine if they are positive or negative. Dismiss the negative thoughts and entertain the positive thoughts. While this process might seem difficult at first, you will find that it gets easier with time.

If you find yourself unknowingly interacting with negative thoughts without fully realizing it, there are a few ways you can try to make negative thoughts more noticeable. The first is to simply think of a happy memory as soon as you realize you are having a negative thought. This will get your

mind in the habit of disrupting counterproductive thoughts that may appear while you are working to be more self-confident.

If this method is not severe enough to break you out of your negative thoughts, consider wearing a rubber band around your wrist and snapping it each time you notice yourself entertaining a negative thought. The added stimuli required to connect the mental activity to a physical one should be enough to snap you out of the negative thought habit.

Focus on having fun: Life gets busy. When we spend most of the day at work to pay the bills and then have to hurry home to get chores done, run errands, make other appointments, pick up the kids and take care of them, and do the million other things that need to get done, it is sometimes hard to have fun.

In addition, most of us have some kind of expectation that we set for ourselves. This can be different for each person involved, but we often become wrapped up in these to the point of distraction. We will focus on all the details of what we need to get done during the day and all of the to-do lists rather than what is most important to us and we forget to have fun.

It is possible to have fun no matter what you are working on in life. And without fun, life becomes dreary and it is hard to have a positive outlook on life and think rationally when we are dealing with other people. So, no matter what task you are working on today, find a way to make it fun. While you are working, take some time to get up during lunch to go on a walk and see something new. When you are driving the kids to another appointment, make up a silly song and laugh with them. While you are cleaning the house, turn it into a game.

Life is boring when you just focus on all the details and the things that you have to get done, and often this can make you bitter about all the things that you are missing out on. But when you learn how to focus on all the fun, life can be so much better.

Quick tips for success

Congratulate yourself: As you complete your goals and do well in your everyday life, congratulate yourself. When you earn a pat on the back, who better to give it to you than yourself?

Treat yourself first: There will be times that you need to put yourself first to stay stable. If you need a personal day to stay sane, take one. It's always good to put others' emotions first, but there will be times that that can't be the case for your own health.

Go outside: If you're not going outside to exercise, go out to get a breath of fresh air and some sun. Sun helps with your daily vitamins as well as reduces depression.

Talk to people: Humans are social creatures. That's cliché, but it's very true. Every day make it a point to talk to someone, anyone, to get your fill. Even if you just say hello to your neighbor or mail-carrier, it can turn a day around instantly.

Spend time with yourself: Learn to be happy spending time with yourself. If you don't like hanging out by yourself, others will pick up on it.

Reflect: Every day, find time to reflect on your day. Consider what you did well and what you can improve on, your mistakes and victories, if you overcame a challenge or if you couldn't figure out a problem. Spend time considering what you did well and what you can do in the future to better how you handled a situation.

Be flexible: Life never goes according to plan. You can plan out weeks in advance and, chances are, something will mess up those plans. Remain flexible and willing to alter your schedule to make life easier on yourself. If you prepare yourself mentally for changes that may occur, when plans do go awry, you won't be as stressed.

Laugh: Whether something legitimately makes you laugh or not, find a reason to. Laughter releases endorphins in your brain, which make you happier. If you can't find anything to laugh about, fake it. Fake laughter has the potential to lead to real laughter.

Don't compare yourself to you: Too many times, people have distorted views of themselves. Understand that every flaw you see in yourself, every minor little error in your face, is most likely invisible to those around you. Everyone has flaws they don't like about themselves and focusing on them will drive you to depression.

Be nice to people: This one may seem pretty obvious, but it's something people forget to do more often than not. Being nice to other people for the sake of being nice makes you feel better as well. Sure, this can be seen as a selfish reason to be nice, but if making someone else feel better it's ok to feel good about it. Remember, even a small compliment to someone you've never talked to has the potential to put them in a happy mood for the rest of the day.

CHAPTER 7: GETTING STARTED WITH MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness meditation is a type of meditation that focuses on being as aware of each moment as possible, thereby helping the consciousness to expand by forming a stronger connection with the present. Mindfulness meditation has a long history of practice as part of the Buddhist faith, where it is revered for its ability to improve both mental happiness and physical well-being. This has been corroborated by research that shows that mindfulness meditation is a beneficial treatment for a variety of mental conditions. What's more, it has also been shown to be effective when treating conditions such as anxiety, stress, and drug addiction.



Practicing mindfulness is a skill and like all skills can be improved with practice. To practice mindful meditation, you simply try to retain as much focus on the current moment as possible with the help of repetitive

breathing and the information being relayed by the senses. Studies have shown that practicing mindfulness for just 15 minutes per day can lead to measurable results when it comes to reducing stress and improving a sense of self. This is caused in no small part by the positive effects mindfulness has on emotional regulation, attention span, and body awareness. What's more, neuroimaging results show that practicing mindfulness also helps the mind process information more effectively.

While mindfulness can be practiced almost anywhere at nearly any time, the concept began as a structured meditation technique practiced by Buddhists known as vipassana. Roughly translated this means to live in the moment while understanding that sometimes you must be aware of the future as well. The general idea is that achieving vipassana will allow you to come to understand the universe as a whole and comes through the knowledge of a few key principals.

Generally known as the three marks of existence, non-self, dissatisfaction, and impermanence are thought of as the three factors that unite all living things. The idea behind non-self is that you must know where the world ends and you begin and that by focusing on this definition you may better understand both sides of it. The idea of dissatisfaction comes from the fact that striving to find satisfaction in temporary things is inherently a flawed notion because all living things are impermanent, and you must come to terms with that fact if you wish to find peace.

The idea of practicing mindfulness first caught on in the Western world in the early part of the 1970s. Professor Jon Kabat-Zinn is credited with creating a mindfulness-based method of stress reduction that paired mindfulness with yoga to great result. While Zinn didn't do anything particularly new, the fact that his techniques led to measurable improvements for a wide variety of ailments both mental and physical led to additional studies on the topic. These studies have shown time and again how effective practicing mindfulness can be, which has led to a steady increase in the practice. It is now regularly practiced in schools, veteran treatment facilities, hospitals, and even prisons.

Research shows that practicing mindfulness regularly can improve brain health as well as function, and starting young will ensure your brain retains

more volume as you age. Those who regularly practice mindfulness will also find they have a thicker hippocampus and, as a result, have an easier time learning and retaining more information. They will also notice that the part of the amygdala that controls fear, anxiety, and stress is less active.

Beyond the physical changes, regularly practicing mindfulness has been shown to decrease instances of participants' minds getting stuck in negative thought patterns while at the same time increasing focus. This should not come as a surprise given the fact that a recent Johns Hopkins study found that regularly practicing mindfulness meditation is equally effective at treating depression, ADD, and anxiety. It also improves verbal reasoning skills as shown in a study that found that GRE students who practiced mindfulness performed up to 16 points better than their peers.

Getting started with mindfulness meditation

While more fully connecting with every moment might sound like something that is beyond your ken, the fact of the matter is that once you commit the practice of mindfulness meditation to habit, the improved state will come to you quite quickly. What's more, once you understand the basics you will likely find that you can practice mindfulness meditation virtually anywhere as long as you can commit to being fully in the present and listening to the things your body is telling you.

While mindfulness meditation is exceedingly malleable, when you are first starting out you should set aside at least 15 minutes a day in a place that is free of distractions in order to start seeing benefits as quickly as possible. The space you choose should be somewhere you can feel truly relaxed and not have to worry about anything. As mindfulness meditation is all about getting in touch with yourself and the signals your body is sending you, starting with the fewest number of external stimuli is the preferable choice.

Form a routine: The easiest way to transition the act of mindfulness meditation into a habit is to start by making it part of your daily routine. As with any of the new habits discussed in these pages, letting your mind and body get used to the practice and expect it at the same time every day is crucial to keeping it around long enough for it to become a habit. Practicing mindfulness meditation requires nothing special and the benefits will not be immediately apparent, so many people find it easy to make excuses to not practice regularly.

If you find that you are constantly coming up with excuses not to meditate then you will want to remember the ancient mindfulness saying that goes something like, "Practice mindfulness meditation for 15 minutes per day; unless, of course, your schedule is very full in which case you will want to practice for 30 minutes." Don't use the outside world to make excuses that affect your potential for inner peace, find a few spare minutes each day and commit to doing so for 30 days, at the end of this time you will be glad you stuck with it.

Get started by focusing on the moment: While the ultimate goal of mindfulness meditation is to quiet the mind in an effort to find a state of internal calm despite the hustle and bustle of the outside world, many

people find it difficult to achieve this state right out of the gate. Instead, you will likely find it easier to start to supplant any thoughts you might have by focusing all of your attention on the signals that your senses are relaying to you to the exclusion of everything else. While you might not feel as though you are receiving much data on the physical world, especially if you are practicing in a quiet, temperate space, the truth of the matter is that your brain naturally filters out approximately eighty percent of everything it receives, you just need to get in the habit of tapping into it.

With practice, you will learn to tune out your more common thoughts and to instead tune into what is going on around you. When you do this, it is important to simply take in the information your senses are providing without thinking about it too deeply or passing judgment on what you perceive. Judging tends to lead to additional thoughts or, even worse, comparison of the present group of situations to those of the past. This is more likely to pull you out of the moment and make finding the state of calm you are looking for even more difficult, especially when you are just getting started.

Remember, the goal with mindfulness meditation is to get as close to existing in the moment as possible and ignoring everything outside of your current surroundings as much as possible. To reach the required state you need to focus on your breathing, the feel of the air slowly entering and exiting your lungs as well as any smells or tastes that go along with this practice. From there you can then expand the sphere of observation to any other sensations that your body might be experiencing, all the while going deeper into yourself in search of the point where your mind ceases to form new thoughts and simply exists in a state of peaceful relaxation.

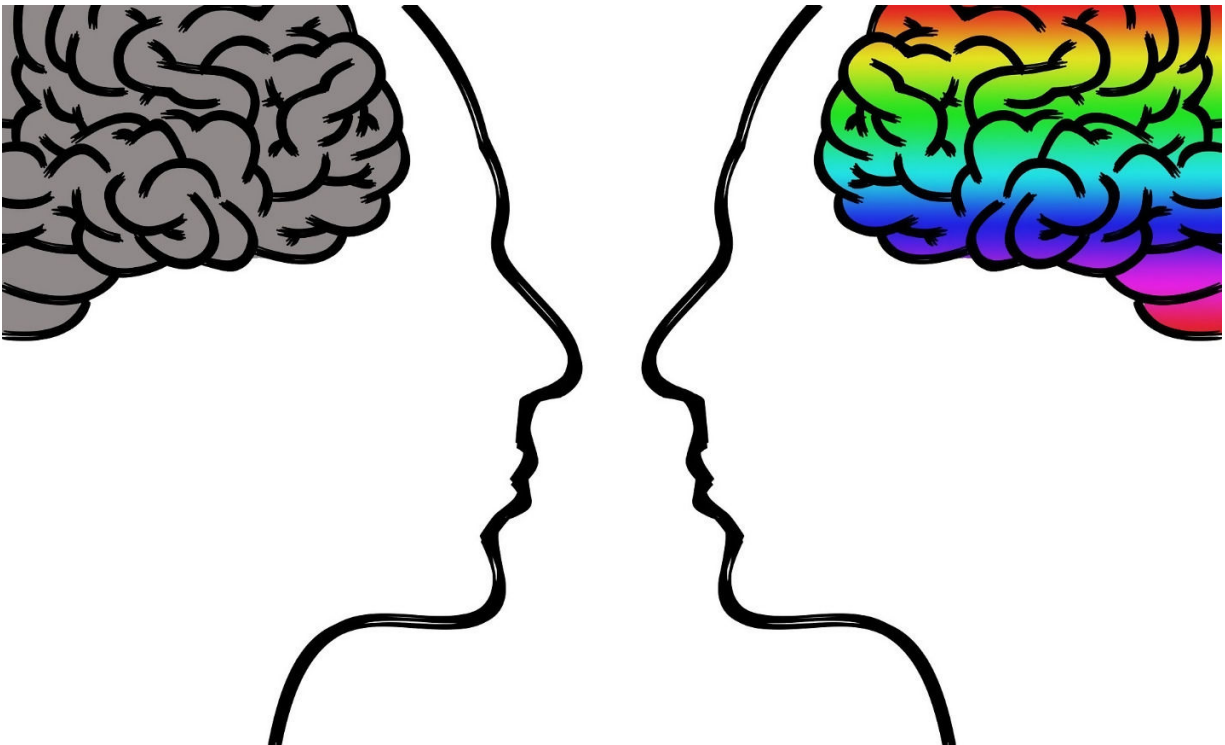
Don't judge: Let your senses expand outward and take in everything that is going on around you. When taking in the information around you, it is important to make a conscious effort not to judge the information that you are taking in, only to experience it. Judging the things that you are experiencing can easily lead to additional related thoughts or a comparison of multiple different situations, and by then your mind will be running a mile a minute as normal.

If you find that you are having a hard time diverging yourself from your errant thoughts, you may find it helpful to picture each thought that enters your mind as being encased in a bubble. Visualize standing outside this stream of bubbles and looking in at them, take note of them but do not engage. If you find a specific thought catching your attention, all you need to do is gently prod your mind into letting it go. When it comes to letting go of these thoughts, it is important to not dwell on the fact that you are having a hard time and instead simply move on and keep trying.

Keep it up: It is important to begin your mindfulness meditation with the right mindset, which means going into the process with the right mindset. Specifically, it is important to not expect to be able to keep up the process indefinitely, right away. Holding back the torrent of thoughts that are naturally running through your head can be a serious project and it is likely something that you will have trouble doing for more than a few minutes at a time, at least at first. With practice, however, you should easily be able to get that number to 15 minutes, if not higher.

CHAPTER 8: EXPANDING YOUR MINDFUL PRACTICE

Once you get the hang of the basics of mindfulness meditation, you will find that there is practically nothing you can't do that doesn't lend itself to being mindful. The following are some of the easiest ways to get into the habit of practicing mindfulness meditation around your home, but you can also practice at work, on public transportation, or even while driving. With a little extra practice, the wide variety of times you can easily slip into a mindful state are sure to surprise you.



Start the day the right way: It doesn't matter what routines you use to start your day, odds are good you use at least one hot drink to get you started. Adding a few steps of ritual to that enjoyment can help you face the day knowing you have already taken steps to keep depression at bay. As with any other type of mindfulness, it is important to push any and all of your cares aside and focus on the here, the now, and your favorite hot beverage.

- Start the day by considering the thoughts that greet you as you wake. Why are these thoughts with you on this fine morning? Consider the specifics as you go through your morning routine, taking special care to stop when you get to preparing your morning beverage.
- Take the time to really focus on the task of preparing the beverage. Think about how great it is going to be and hope it will help you start your day off on the best foot possible.
- Continue this anticipation as you take the drink with you and find a quiet spot to take a few minutes to yourself while you make the most of that which you are excited for.
- Gather your attention and direct it completely towards the cup in your hands, consider the feel of the cup, the sight of the liquid, and the smell of it ready to meet your lips
- Take the first sip. Let the taste of the drink wash over you as it flows over your tongue and down your throat. Consider the benefits of the drink and the many ways it is helping you start your day.

Finish the drink and take one more moment to be grateful for the day ahead. *Be mindful while driving:* By practicing mindfulness meditation on the road, you will find that you arrive at work ready to meet the challenges of the day without being angry about them and arrive home at the end of the day with a clear head and heart, with the cares of the day left somewhere on the turnpike. Practicing mindfulness meditation on the go will allow you to reach your destination in a calm and focused state, which allows the stresses of rush hour traffic to fade into the background. What's more, practicing mindfulness meditation will also ensure you drive as safely as possible because you will be completely focused on the moment and the traffic that surrounds you.

In order to make the most of your commute, practice mindfulness from the very first moment that you enter your vehicle. As such, the first thing that you do is announce your intention aloud to the universe to help you get into the right mindset from the start. With your intentions made plain, the next thing that you do (even before starting your vehicle) is take several deep breaths.

During this period, take special care to focus on your body and the way it feels as you sit in your seat, the way your hands feel on the steering wheel, and the way the world around you looks as you stare out at it from behind the windshield. From there, let the sensations of feeling expand outward and downward so that you feel your feet and the pressure you exert on the pedals before starting your vehicle.

As you begin your commute, pay special attention to everything that is going on around you, both to the vehicles that you are directly interacting with as well as the people on the sidewalk and the buildings and signs that you previously passed without giving them a second thought. While this is going on, be sure to also give some attention to your eyes as they are taking everything in and your ears as they convey the sounds of hundreds, if not thousands, of other people all moving together in relative harmony.

Being mindful on public transit: Start by ensuring you feel comfortable in your current space. You won't be able to meditate effectively if you have to keep one eye on your things for fear of someone stealing them. Unless you are listening to a guided meditation exercise, you should turn off any music or podcasts to ensure you are able to fully focus on the present. Keeping your headphones in is a good way to ensure that you are not disturbed during your meditation.

Assume a relaxed, inconspicuous position with your feet on the ground and your legs planted with only a little space between them. Continue this proper, relaxed position up your body with your spine stretched but still curved naturally. If you don't find that your current situation allows for this position, aim to sit or stand with a proper posture and you will be fine.

Choose a point a few feet in front of you on the ground and stare at it while at the same time ensuring that it is only your gaze and not your head that is drifting towards the ground. Start by feeling all of the sensations that your body is providing you before working your gaze up slowly, taking in new stimuli as you go.

Focus on breathing regularly; don't let the hustle and bustle of the commute distract you. Early on, if you are anxious about missing your stop, here are a few places to direct your attention to ensure you don't get too caught up in the exercise.

Focus on the movement of the bus/train/subway and how that movement reacts to your body and vice versa. Start at one end of your body and work your way up before switching directions. If you find yourself changing position, try again with the goal of spotting all of the differences.

Concentrate on the number of stops. For example, if you have 6 stops to go, focus on repeating the number 6 over and over again, before switching to 5, to 4, etc. This decreasing number can be seen as a mantra, and focusing on the number over and over again can help you stay in the moment.

Being mindful at work: The best way to go about being mindful in the workplace is to utilize what is known as micro meditations. Shorter than even a mindfulness minute, micro meditations can be done any time you find a gap in your workflow, regardless of how long that gap may ultimately be. The more frequently you use micro meditations, the shorter you can ultimately make them. Ideally, you should be able to gain all the benefits of a micro meditation in just 10 seconds, without even breaking stride in your work.

Clearing your mind in the middle of the workday can be tricky, but like with all types of mindfulness, each time you do so will make the next time that much easier. Don't push yourself unreasonably, however, starting with just a few micro meditations each day is still a great effort in the right direction. If you work in an office, any time you need a moment to catch your breath, and you want that moment to last as long as possible, consider the following. Otherwise, alter it for your situation as needed.

1. As you breathe in and out normally, be aware of the breath in your lungs before expanding that awareness outward.
2. Become aware of your fingers as they glide across the keyboard in front of you; listen to the sound of the keys pressing as you go about your business. Focus on the decision to press each key and the resulting actions that come into play because of it.
3. Focus on your body, straightening your posture to its ideal limits and taking in the sensations being given off by the lower half of your body.

4. Take one more breath and let the rest of the world back in to continue on about your day as normal.

Additionally, any time you find yourself in a meeting or a particularly long conversation with a coworker, you can use the opportunity to slip into a mindful mindset by simply focusing on what the other person is saying to the exclusion of everything else that is going on around you. Remember, being mindful isn't about being choosy when it comes to which moments you are fully present in; it is about embracing the now in all its many forms.

Exercising mindfully: As previously noted, any activity that doesn't require your full, active attention is a great candidate for mindfulness, and exercise is no exception. In fact, exercise and mindfulness is an extremely effective match as exercise naturally pushes the sensations the body is providing to the forefront of the mind, making mindfulness only an additional step away. As such, it doesn't require much more to move into a true mindful state and strengthen your body and mind all at once. What's more, those who make a habit of exercising while practicing mindfulness report a noticeable increase in their overall level of endurance as well as a general performance boost as well.

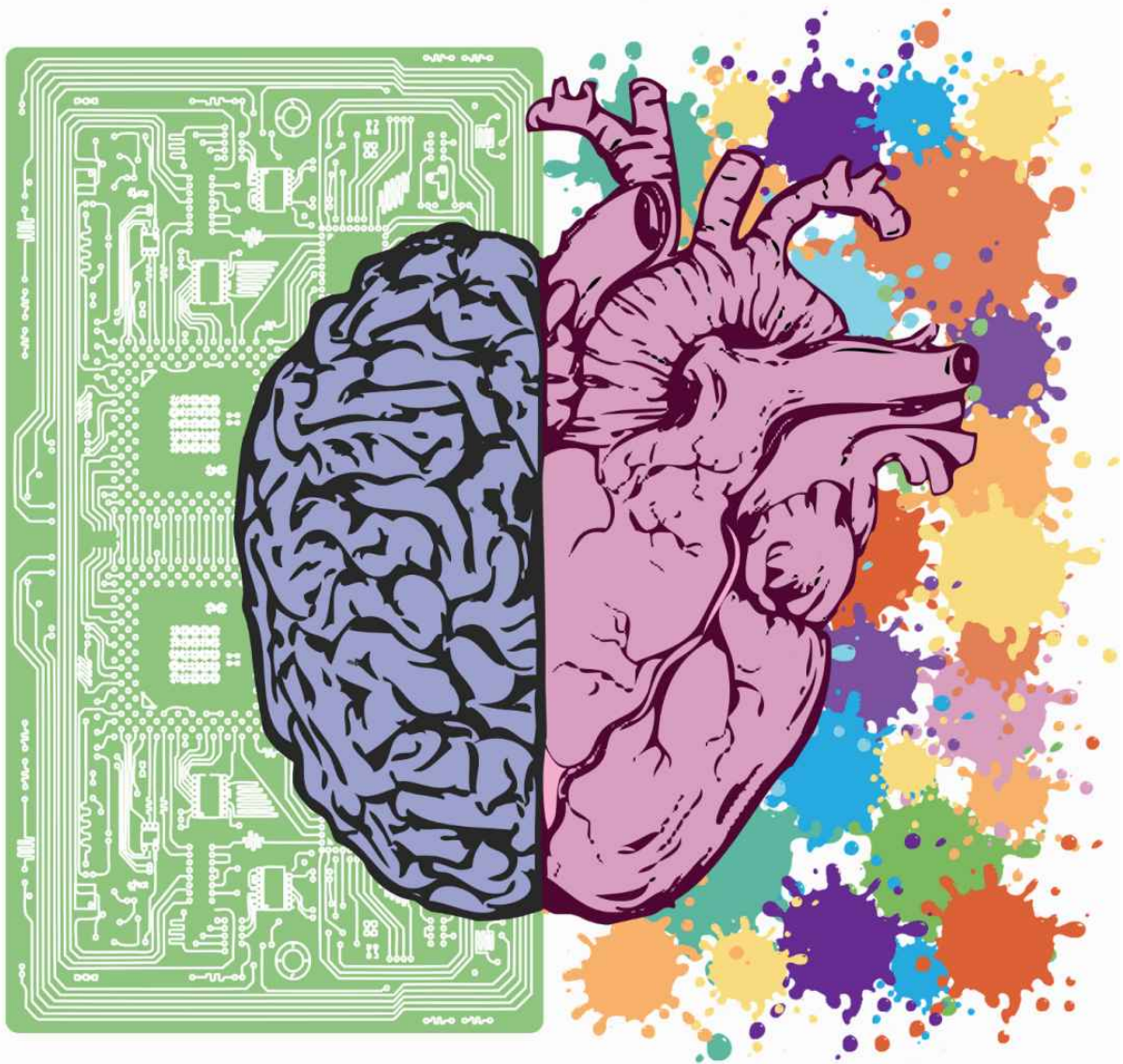
Being mindful while doing chores: While no one really enjoys doing household chores, looking at them as a way to practice mindfulness meditation makes them feel much less like meaningless drudgery. What's more, they will often provide you with a way to practice mindfulness while still being outwardly productive as well. When it comes to practicing mindfulness meditation in a wide variety of scenarios successfully, it is important to keep in mind that it can be done during any physical activity that doesn't require a lot of complicated mental activity.

When it is time to tackle your chores, the first thing you do is clear your mind and get in touch with the signals that your body is putting out. Once you have primed your mind, you will then commit yourself to the moment-to-moment nature of the activity you are currently taking part in and ensure that your mind doesn't just tune out the way most people allow it to while doing chores or other relatively mindless tasks. Rather, you should start by focusing on the way your hands feel as they are going through the motions of the task at hand.

Likewise, take in all of the information that your eyes are providing you as you go through the task and watch as what you are doing alters the state of the physical world around you. Additionally, take in the smells of the task and consider what they signify. Finally, when you complete one task, take a few moments to enjoy the feeling of accomplishment that comes along with a job well done.

CHAPTER 9: IMPROVING YOUR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

When it comes to finding your focus and unleashing your inner creativity, improving your emotional intelligence (EQ) is a great way to determine any personal blocks that might keep you from finding the success you are looking for. While it is not nearly as well publicized as IQ, EQ is just as important, as it is what helps create action out of positive intentions, connect with other people in productive ways, and make important life decisions.



EQ is the ability to utilize emotion to identify, understand, use, and manage your emotions as effectively as possible to ensure you always communicate clearly, reduce stress, connect empathically to those around you, minimize conflict, and maximize success. Your level of EQ also makes it easier to understand what others are feeling and put yourself more successfully in their shoes. This understanding comes from picking up on body language and other nonverbal cues and is essential to getting ahead in the business world and forming long-lasting and meaningful relationships.

Those who have high levels of EQ embody four primary attributes.

Self-awareness: Those with a high EQ understand the emotions they are feeling as they occur and understand how they may affect their actions. By more clearly understanding their weaknesses, as well as their strengths, they can be more confident overall regardless of the situation.

Self-control: Those who understand their emotions can control them more easily when required, leading to fewer impulsive reactions. They don't just close their feelings off, however, they manage them in healthy ways and are also known to take initiative, honor commitments, and handle change easily.

Social awareness: Those with enough EQ are able to easily understand the emotions that others are feeling as well as the roots of those emotions. They can understand emotional tells and cues, are comfortable in social situations, and understand power dynamics and their importance in the social structure.

Relationship management: Those who understand their emotions also understand how to maintain healthy relationships while still developing new ones. They can influence and inspire others with their clear communication and ability to diffuse conflict. It is for these reasons that they often make good team leaders.

Improving your emotional intelligence

Though our capacity to recognize and handle your and other's emotions is largely determined by childhood experiences, heredity, and other factors, it isn't rigid. We can alter our ability to comprehend and manage emotions over the long term with the right coaching and dedication. You can change, of course, but the question is do you want to change? Are you willing to put in the effort required to be more emotionally intelligent? Sometimes, while you may successfully be able to manage your external emotions, you may still grapple with emotions you do not manage to display on the outside.

While some folks are naturally positive, calm, and social, others can be plain grumpy, egoistic, shy, or insecure. However, no trait is unchangeable. If you truly want to change an aspect of your personality, you can. Emotional intelligence naturally increases with age, without any intervention. This is the rationale behind the popular belief that people gain more maturity as they grow older. Overall, yes, it is possible to improve your emotional quotient over the long-term with intervention, guidance, and regular practice.

Take a closer look at your feelings: If you are like most people these days then you are likely to find it difficult to sort your day from the hectic mess of appointments and deadlines that you have to muddle through. As such, it can be difficult to correctly monitor your thoughts, much less your emotional state. This issue can then frequently be compounded even more by other stressors and distractions that can make it easy for poorly thought out actions to slip through, which never does any good for anybody. This is why it is crucial that you get in the habit of practicing proper communication when possible, which means prioritizing communications with others when they do occur.

Emotions are often tied to events that take place in your immediate vicinity, but this doesn't automatically mean that they are valid. It is actually common for the emotion you are feeling right now, to be tied to something you have felt in the past that this situation is simply reminding you of. If you find yourself dealing with this type of scenario, then regardless of how you feel in the moment, it is likely that you are dealing with an incorrect

response, which means you will need to work on limiting that association in your mind ASAP.

Being aware of your feelings is a skill, which means that it can be improved if you are willing to practice doing so. To that end, you should pick a set time each day to practice this skill, once in the morning and then again in the evening. When practicing, check in with all of the emotions you have felt since your last check-in and determine if the emotion you felt was an accurate response to the stimuli that was taking place at the time. When thinking back to these emotions, consider the physical response that it brought out in you as well as the mental response. Do your best to connect the feelings you have to a specific emotion so that you can become aware of what is going on when you feel it again in the future.

Respond rather than react: Reacting is a more unconscious and uncontrolled process that is a result of an emotional trigger. For instance, you snap when someone annoys you or you are already stressed due to another reason. Responding, on the other hand, is more controlled and something you choose to do. You decide exactly how you behave in a given situation. For example, you could explain to someone that you are not feeling too good and that this isn't the best time to interrupt you, and that later you'd be in a much better position to listen to them. You've simply chosen to deal with the situation in a more productive and less impulsive manner by taking control of your emotions.

Evaluate how your actions will impact others before acting. If your behavior will affect others, try to place yourself in their shoes. How are they bound to feel if you say or do something? Would you like to go through the experience yourself? If you have to take a particular action, can you help people in coping with its effects?

Be aware of those around you: Once you have a better understanding of your own emotions and how they affect your behavior, you will find it much easier to register the emotions that others are feeling and relate them to their actions as well. In this phase, focus more on noticing and deciphering the cues and tells that others put off in relation to specific emotions in your own social group. It is important to also consider power dynamics and how they affect any social group.

In order to effectively begin improving your general level of social awareness, you will need to try and improve your overall level of empathy and relate what you have already learned to those around you as well as making it clear you are actively participating in any conversation. While this second part seems simple, it is often easier said than done, which is why it is important to convey the message that you value the other person's time and input in each and every conversation.

First, picture the last few conversations you had with those outside your immediate social circle. Do you typically take the time to put away distractions while other people are speaking to you? How much eye contact do you use when speaking? How about when listening? Are you an active listener, and is that reflected in your body language?

In general, you should make a point to always use body language that is open including not touching your face, not creating artificial barriers, laughing or smiling regularly, using lots of eye contact, not crossing your arms or legs, and slightly leaning towards the other person. Even if the things you say are pleasant and friendly, the only thing other people will hear is your closed body language. Make the extra effort and others will respond in kind.

It is equally important to ensure you are communicating effectively with what you say as well as your body language. It is always important to finish up any important conversation with a recap to ensure that both parties are on the same page at every juncture. While some people might think this indicates they weren't listening, it actually shows you value the other person's time as well as your own by not wasting it over simple miscommunication.

Consider your values: As you go throughout your day, make an effort to consciously monitor the things you are doing and consider why exactly you are doing them. Consider the purpose behind why you are doing the things you are doing as well as if they are the best use of your time at the moment. If you don't think what you are doing is the most important thing you could be doing, dig a little deeper and consider why you felt the need to move forward with it regardless.

Making a list of everything that you do in a given day will help you to identify the things that are most important to you and if you are spending your time actively furthering these goals. This will help you focus on your feelings more accurately and know yourself more completely. If you discover that you are doing lots of things for what you perceive are the wrong reasons, then you may need to look more closely at your values as something that is definitely out of sorts. Look at your list and see what has changed recently; this will help you determine just what has changed to alter your reasons for doing things.

With all of the information at your fingertips, you should be able to work through what has been going on in your life that would change your emotions in such a way that they would alter your actions to align with the things that you have been doing lately. Don't get discouraged if you can't draw a direct line between cause and effect right away. The things you could be doing now might not relate to any of your emotional changes, at least on the surface. With enough hard work and dedication to the task at hand, however, you should be able to determine just what is going on and what emotional changes need to be made in order to get things back on track.

Bedtime reflection: Reflect not on what is going to happen, but instead look at the things that have already taken place. Mentally go through the things that happened in your day and ask yourself:

- Did you behave according to your principles?
- Did you treat the people with whom you interacted with in a friendly and considerate manner?
- What vices did you fight?
- Did you make yourself a better person by cultivating your virtues?

You may even want to write down your reflections and plan the next day too. Write down your notes and what you want to reflect on in the morning. What you do today will link up with tomorrow morning's reflection. In your journal, write down what you want to improve the next day. It doesn't have to be a big thing. Write it down no matter how small the improvement may

be. If you keep this up for 21 days, you'll be surprised how much you can and will be able to change.

Along with your notes, also remind yourself that this day has ended and there is no way you can change anything about it unless you time travel. What has happened, has happened. The sun will rise tomorrow.

CHAPTER 10: IMPROVE YOUR CONFIDENCE

Being more confident is something that many people dream of, but few have a good idea of how to go about making it a reality. If you ask a confident person why they are so confident, they most likely won't have an answer; it is just a part of who they are, a mindset they adopt without thinking about it.



It is easy to sit back and think about being more confident in the future, but it is much more difficult to take the first few steps that will lead to noticeable results further down the line. If you are having trouble putting your thoughts into actions, know that stepping out of your comfort zone is difficult, maybe even scary, for everyone. If you still aren't convinced, try the following to get you started.

- *Think about how much you want it:* The next time you find yourself hesitating when it comes to taking a more confident approach to a situation, give yourself an extra moment to think it through. Consider

how much being confident in this situation would improve your current circumstances, and how much better your life would be if you approached every situation that way. With this little boost of persuasion, you will be surprised how much easier it will be to make confident choices.

- *Want it less:* While counterintuitive, thinking less about the consequences of following through on the current set of circumstances may also make taking the confident step easier. Stop thinking and act already, the more you consider the right course of action the more monumental it will seem. Identify the best course of action and don't think any more about it, simply follow through.
- *Try to be in the moment:* Perhaps the best way to be more confident is to simply exist more fully in the moment. Also known as mindfulness, attempting to reach a state where you are fully engrossed in the moment to the point where you forget about both the past and the future will ensure that you are more confident simply because you are not worried about mistakes that you made in the past or those that you might make. Consider the moment and you can't go wrong.

Get in your head

Social confidence is a skill, which means that like any other skill the only way that it is ever going to improve is with practice. One of the first mistakes that many people make when it comes to improving their social confidence is they stop trying. Improving from scratch can be a very arduous process and when they don't see immediate results they give up easily. To avoid this reductive cycle, consider the following mental exercises to get you pointed in the right direction.

Consider the source of your fears: When it comes time to practice being confident in social situations, many people find that they are gripped with a sudden bout of nearly insurmountable fear that makes it impossible for them to move forward in a confident fashion. If this sounds like you, the best way to conquer your fear is to consider where it is coming from and what it really means. If you find that anxiety is at the root of your fear, the first thing that you do is consider what about the situation is causing you to be anxious. If nothing pertinent comes to mind, there is a good chance that what has instead happened is that you have gotten yourself trapped in a pattern of anxiety when it comes to social situations.

The human brain loves patterns, so much so, that it frequently creates patterns out of abstract stimuli, even where no true correlations exist. If upon closer inspection, it turns out that there really isn't all that much to worry about at the moment, then you may find it useful to try to cognitively reframe that anxiety into another, more positive emotion. For example, instead of being anxious about the current situation you could focus on all of the unknown variables until you become curious about the outcome instead of nervous as to the results. This process is known as cognitive reframing, and while it likely won't cause your anxiety to disappear completely, it can at least help take the edge off in a very real way.

Imagine yourself being successful in social situations: As hard as it may be to believe, imagining yourself getting better at social interactions can actually have a measurable effect on your performance in the real world, but only if you go about doing it in the right way.

To get started, imagine yourself in a place that you are very familiar with, where you are likely to run into individuals that you do not know terribly

well, if at all. When you are imagining this place, visualize it as completely as possible.

Once you have a setting in mind, put yourself into the space. However, you are not going to want to inhabit the space in your body as you would if you were really there. Put yourself into the space as though you are viewing yourself in the third person.

Once you are in the imaginary space and settled in a location you would be likely to inhabit in real life, the next thing you do is bring in someone you would like to have a conversation with. The specifics don't matter as long as you tend to be anxious when trying to speak with them in real life.

Now, imagine having a conversation with that person. Think through both sides of the conversation and make all the responses, both yours and the other person's as natural and realistic as possible. At first, you don't need to do anything more than play out the conversation as it would naturally occur and try to get a real flow going.

Once you have successfully made it through an entire imagined dialogue, odds are you have now spent upwards of 30 minutes practicing genuine conversation, regardless of the fact that you were providing both sides of it. This exercise primes your brain to continue working on these types of problems in the background so that your brain will be more primed to utilize these types of neural pathways in the future.

Stop to think about the worst-case scenario: When it comes to practicing self-confidence, especially when you are still getting the hang of it, it is perfectly natural for your mind to throw up roadblocks to your success. These typically manifest themselves in a wide variety of scenarios that may occur if you take the more assertive course of action. While convincing at the moment, these scenarios typically are only loosely based in reality, which is why it is best to ignore them and push forward.

While this may be easier said than done, understanding that everyone is the center of their own universe can make the idea of trying and failing much easier to handle. Just keep telling yourself that what feels like major, embarrassing events to you, may very well be completely glossed over by those around you. Failure by itself is nothing to be ashamed of, trying and

failing once may even make trying a second time that much easier. If these facts aren't quite enough to make failure more palatable, consider the following:

Ask yourself what you can learn from the current situation: If you can't convince yourself that you aren't going to fail, do yourself a favor and stop focusing on it. If you instead take the idea that you are going to fail as a fact, you can stop dreading it so much and instead think of everything that follows as an opportunity for learning. If you learn as much as you can about the situation in question, then you improve your odds of doing things better the next time. What's more, without the added pressure of worrying about failing, you may just find that you exceed your own expectations.

Think about the odds: If you never try, you'll never succeed. If instead of running from every opportunity to display self-confidence, you seek out as many of them as you can find, statistically speaking, you can't fail every single time. Until you make it more of a daily habit, being self-confident is a numbers game. The more you play the odds, the more you're likely to come up a winner.

Fake it

Specifically, you may find that faking a degree of confidence that you don't yet feel can be an extremely effective way to improve social interactions of all types, without having to have fully deal with the issues that may be at the root of your lack of confidence. While this might sound ridiculous, take a moment and consider a scenario where you were interacting with a person who you identify as being supremely confident. Now consider all the things about this person that made you believe they were confident and ask yourself how would you have known if they were faking it?

The truth of the matter is that if you act confidently in a given situation then those around you will have no reason to assume you feel otherwise. As such, pretending to have confidence and actually being confident are two sides of the same coin. Having success when pretending to have confidence once will make it much easier to do a second time, and what's more, each additional time you pretend to have confidence you will have to pretend less and less until you won't be pretending at all.

Acting confident: In order to act the way a confident person would act in a given situation, all you need to do is to visualize someone you know who is confident and then ask yourself what they would do if they were in your position. From there, it is just a matter of following their lead. Think about the way they would present themselves, what type of gestures they would use, what type of body language they would utilize, and how they would speak. With a good role model to follow you will be surprised at how easy playing pretend can be.

Be aware of your body language: It is important to keep your body language in mind when it comes to faking confidence, as it is one of the easiest ways to give yourself away without even thinking about it. Those who are confident typically walk with their shoulders squared and don't fidget or move around much while they are speaking. When you are talking, focus on making eye contact and make a conscious effort to relax your muscles as well. When you are meeting someone new, always offer your hand and shake in a firm, decisive manner. If necessary, simply imagine that you are in a more relaxing situation and your body will respond in kind. If

you mentally remove yourself from the situation, even to just a slight degree, you will often see dramatic improvements in your body language.

Consider if you are proactive or reactive

The confident person does not wait for something to happen (and when someone does, usually nothing happens) but makes something happen in every area of his life. With it comes the realization of self-responsibility and not blaming anyone else for their disadvantages and shortcomings.

Proactivity is the concept of taking control over your own life circumstances, claiming responsibility for who you are and your situations, and taking the necessary actions needed to master life. The choice is a principle that is behind proactivity since we all have a choice in how to react to the events we experience. The way we react then determines the way those things will affect us. People who are not proactive are usually quicker to react to negative events, believe that they are victims who cannot change the way they respond, and then end up feeling a lot less empowered and confident in themselves.

People who are always trying to “one-up” others are not being proactive; they are being reactive. Instead of taking a rational and grounded approach where they are responsible for their own feelings, they react. People who say that someone “made them” feel a certain way is living out this type of victim mentality.

There are two different ways to think of your life circumstances: in terms of “having” or “being.” For instance, some may think, “If I just had this, I would be happier,” while other, more confident and proactive people would think, “I can learn to be proactive and resourceful, then I will be happier.” In other words, they are focusing on what they can change instead of what they can’t. Here are some lessons to keep in mind about proactivity and confidence:

- If you feel as though you’re being tossed about by the waves in your life, remember that you are the captain and can steer yourself in another direction.
- Come up with a plan of action, whether it’s a chart, schedule, or checklist, to reward yourself whenever you achieve a goal or take a proactive approach.

CHAPTER 11: CONSIDER MINIMALISM

Why minimalism? The truth is the reason is different for everyone. What works for you may not work for someone else, and what works for someone else, may not work for you. However, everyone can benefit from this lifestyle. Whether you go big or go small, there are so many benefits, that there is something for everyone. Even if it is just getting rid of some junk and managing your collection of stuff before you become a hoarder. Don't laugh; it is a serious problem for some people. The less stuff you have to begin with, the harder it is to become a hoarder. You want to make sure that you are keeping your level of stuff down before you go too far.



Minimalism can give you back your life. If you feel like you are weighed down by a ball and chain, then you will find that you are not very happy, and you will feel like your life is not your own. You have to be able to regain your life to get any semblance of happiness again. Minimalism will teach you to live for you, and not to live for anyone else because you will

be in competition with no one. You will have your few possessions, and your neighbor can have all the stuff he wants, working his life away to pay for the flashy things he has. Meanwhile, you are racking up savings by not buying all those fancy toys.

There is a lot of joy knowing that if a new cell phone comes out you do not have to have it. Because lately when a new phone comes out, it is priced at around \$1,000 dollars brand new. What?! That is a month's rent right there. Possibly more in some areas. If you live in the Midwest, that is a month's rent in a nice house with the gas and electric bill. If you are content with what you have, you will never have to worry about what others have, because you simply won't care. Watch their faces as they drone on and on about their newest television, and they realize that they can rub it in your face all they want, and you still won't care.

They will try everything in their power to make you jealous. To make you ooh and ahh. If you don't, they will feel like their purchase was all for naught, which in reality, it really is. You only buy fancy gadgets to impress others. Why else would you throw out a completely functional television just to get something that does the same thing but is bigger? When you feel like you don't have to impress anyone, material items will seem useless. That is what minimalism is. Realizing that you are in competition with no one but yourself, and material items are not going to help you achieve your goals.

The benefits of this lifestyle have been mentioned throughout the chapter, but let's consolidate them here. You know that this is not the easiest life to live, and there are a lot of hard parts. That is why it is nice to be able to see all of the benefits nicely laid out in front of you, so you can aptly weigh the pros and cons. This is a lifestyle that many can benefit from, but it is hard to follow, so you have to be motivated. Read on to find said motivation.

Less stuff: When was the last time you climbed up in the attic to do something other than clean it so that you can put more stuff up there? With minimalism, you can come home and breathe easily, knowing that you do not have to worry about having a hard time finding what you are looking for because it won't be buried under a mound of junk.

You won't have to dread spring cleaning because it won't take near as long. You won't dread going up into the attic, because there will be hardly anything there, and you can finally turn it into the master suite you have been dreaming of for years. Having less stuff may seem a little scary, because what if one day you need that potato launcher that you found at a garage sale four years ago and never used?

However, chances are, you won't ever need most of the stuff you are clinging so tightly to. Most of the time, once people let stuff go, they never think of it again. They live a happier life because they can walk through any room of their house with ease and not have a care in the world about opening the closet in the hall to grab their coat. That is a great benefit to have in life.

More free time: This goes hand in hand with less stuff. You free up your life when you free yourself of all of the junk that is weighing you down. When was the last time you were able to go to your kid's ball game and sit through the entire thing without worrying about all of the stuff you need to do at home? When was the last time you told your kid that you would come home on time from work and play catch out in the yard?

When was the last time you were not so swamped with work that you felt so dead you came home and were a zombie? When did you last have actual free time? In today's world, a lot of times, it is less than you realize. With minimalism, you learn how to balance work and home life. It is not just about stuff. It is about needing less stuff so that you do not have to work as much, and you have more time for your family.

With minimalism, you will be able to find yourself loaded with free time, time to spend with your family. You will not be so caught up in your work that you have to give up doing things with those that matter. Instead, you will be able to actually go have fun. You can come home from work excited about the evening ahead of you because you are not coming home to a cluttered mess that has to be taken care of. Instead, you are coming home to a house that doesn't really get messy, so you can relax and watch your kids grow up. You can spend time with your spouse and really get to fall in love with them again. You will have time to just be.

Think back to the last time you took a vacation. It was wonderful, wasn't it? The last time you really did not have to worry about a thing other than enjoying yourself. Imagine if your life was like that pretty much all of the time. With this lifestyle that is possible. You will find that it is much easier to relax when you know that you do not have to deal with clutter in the attic, when you do not have to go through and re-organize the storage room at the back of the house.

One of the best benefits of this lifestyle is that you have free time. When you know that once you get home you have free time. Time to enjoy yourself, rather than put it off for weeks on end and not be able to enjoy yourself, because you know that there are things that you should be doing. A lot of other New Age lifestyles take away your free time and are just one more thing you have to add to your to-do list. This lifestyle gives you your life back, and that is a wonderful feeling.

Brings you closer to life: When was the last time you got to enjoy nature? When was the last time you talked to your neighbor? Do you know your neighbors at all? Most people do not know their neighbors, or thought they did, but don't realize that those neighbors moved out and they have new ones. Most people do not remember when the last time they got out and enjoyed nature was. Chances are, you are one of those people.

That is okay, it is nothing to be ashamed of because there are a lot of people in the world just like you who do not want to change. They don't care to know who their neighbors are. They do not want to get out and enjoy nature; they would rather stay inside with their stuff and watch nature on television. You have noticed that you need a change in life. This lifestyle will bring you this change in life.

Minimalism will bring you that change that you need and will help you see exactly what it is that you need. You will find that you are closer to life than you ever were before. You will be closer to your family, your neighbors, nature. You will enjoy life so much more, and you will be a lot happier than you ever were. You will find that the simple things bring you joy, and it truly is the little things in life that we must hold on to.

As you can tell, there are a lot of benefits to being a minimalist. On top of all of these, you will be happier with life. You will find that life is easier to

handle, and you will not be filled with existential dread. You will find that you greet each day with excitement and that you are ready to face the world with a strong head on your shoulders.

You will want to do everything in your power to keep feeling this way, so as time wears on, this lifestyle will get a lot easier to handle, and you may even want to take it a step further. There is so much going for this life. You can make it however you want it. There is no set amount of minimalism that you have to achieve, and there are no strict guidelines either. You can live by the ideals that if you don't use it, lose it, and get along just fine.

However, you will find that sometimes, the more you get rid of, the happier you are and you'll live a richer life with less stuff. May seem like a paradox, but it is true. There are people who have stuff, and there are people who have done stuff. The people who have stuff often have not done stuff, and the people who have done stuff, often do not have a lot of stuff. That is because it is so much easier to go travel the world if you don't have to worry about a break in.

Getting started

The four-box methodology: This tactic regarding how to declutter any space is truly a minimalistic strategy and less of an organizational one that should be completed after the decluttering process has already been completed. To implement the four-box method, you should obtain four boxes (you may have anticipated the fact that you would need four boxes. It is, after all, called the four-box method). After you've acquired your four boxes, the next step is to designate the four boxes into four different categories. These categories should be labeled as the following:

1. Keep
2. Donate
3. Storage
4. Discard

A good idea would be to write on these boxes with a big black Sharpie marker, or even print out labels from your computer and stick them on the boxes. Regardless of how you do it, make sure that you don't confuse the boxes as you move through this process. Next, choose a room in the house that you're going to target. It's a good idea to only focus on one room at a time so that you stay focused on the stuff that's in one room. One item at a time, separate all of the stuff in the room to determine what you're going to keep, donate, put into storage, and throw away.

A common mistake that people make when they're using the four-box method is that they skip over items in the pre-specified room. Everything, and I mean everything, needs to have a place in one of the four boxes. If you skip over certain items because you can't decide on whether or not you should keep them, then you are missing the point of this entire exercise. No one said that it was going to be easy to choose what to keep and what to discard. Another common mistake that people make as they move through this exercise is that they put too much of their stuff in storage. If you find that you simply cannot separate yourself from a majority of the items in one room, then you may want to perform this exercise once and then visit it again in a few months' time. This way, you get rid of your stuff incrementally instead of all at once.

Learn healthy new habits: Many people own a lot of things because it stops them from having to do as much work, in their mind. For example, they might own five plates if they live alone as one person because it means they don't have to do the dishes as often. However, if you are living by yourself, you might consider just having two plates. One for you, and one for company. Or, if you tend to have a few people over for company, you may have more but only keep two in your main cupboard. Then, when you are done using your dishes, you can wash and dry them right away so they're ready for next time. This is actually a lot less work than using several and then having to fill and unload your dishwasher each day or every other day. The same goes for clothes and laundry, makeup brushes, and other things that you might own several of without actually needing them all!

Consider every single purchase: Before you spend money, really consider it. You should do this any time you're spending money. Just because you're buying something necessary, like groceries, doesn't mean you aren't overindulging. It is not uncommon for people to go to the grocery store and come home with more than they need, and then throw away several items at the end of the week because they turned in the fridge after not being used.

Ideally, you could meal plan and then purchase just what you need. The same goes for frivolous shopping, like clothes and furniture. Of course, we all need clothes and certain furniture items, but it doesn't mean we need excessive amounts. If you don't truly need it, then don't invest in it. The only exception to this rule is if it makes you truly happy and it will continue making you truly happy for a long time to come. Do not spend money for an impulsive need to feel good if the item is later going to make you feel guilty for spending money when you didn't need to.

CONCLUSION

Thanks for making it through to the end of *Take Back Your Day: How Simple Daily Actions Can Change Your Life*, let's hope it was informative and able to provide you with all of the tools you need to achieve your goals, whatever they may be. Just because you've finished this book doesn't mean there is nothing left to learn on the topic, and expanding your horizons is the only way to find the mastery you seek.



Hopefully, you have an understanding of how to get started breaking down old habits and building up new and improved ones, as well as a strategy or two or three that you are anxious to try for the first time. Before you start giving it your all, however, it is important that you have realistic expectations as to the level of success you should expect in the near future.

While it is perfectly true that some people experience serious success right out of the gate, it is an unfortunate fact of life that they are the exception rather than the rule. What this means is that you should expect to

experience something of a learning curve, especially when you are first figuring out what works for you. This is perfectly normal, however, and if you persevere, you will come out the other side better because of it. Instead of getting your hopes up to an unrealistic degree, you should think of your time spent on self-improvement as a marathon rather than a sprint, which means that slow and steady will win the race every single time.

THANKS FOR READING!

I really hope you enjoyed this book, and most of all – got more value from it than you had to give.

It would mean a lot to me if you left an Amazon review – I will reply to all questions asked!

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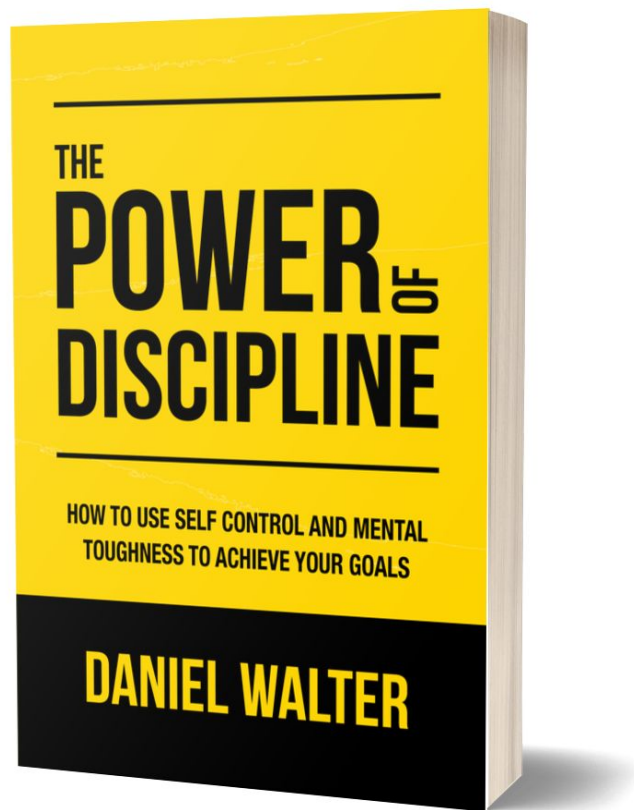
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