



COWORKING

by Corin

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Conscious Attention Management Strategies for Working Smarter



Attention Management is a Key Skill in Working Smart

Time is not our problem. It is distraction and misplaced attention that interfere with our ability to achieve the results that are most significant to us. Attention management strategies help us take back control of our time and energies to work smarter, reclaim cognitive health, and aid us in the ambitious goals we set for ourselves.

It is Challenging to Work Smart and be Prolific

We live in a culture obsessed with personal productivity. The behaviors and corporate culture that has evolved over time produced the concept of multitasking. People are busy, but busy does not mean productive. Science proves that work strategies based on multitasking sabotage performance; they do not allow people to work smart. Besieged by information, task overload, and ceaseless distractions, we have lost the ability to focus and concentrate. We do not know how to control our attention.

- How many of us boast about being busy and our ability to multitask? Computer chips multitask. Human brains do not. A human being has one consciousness. Science shows the human brain is not wired for multitasking. Yet, we are entrenched in the myth that multitasking is productive work. Employers expect it. It is ingrained in how most of us spend our time. It is a vicious cycle. Actually, what we do is switch-task, which has proven to be counter-productive because it takes a mental toll on our cognitive energies, eats up time, and derails mental progress. We may have bursts of energy, but basically we are overwhelmed, partially focused, and scrambling to catch up.
- It is challenging to concentrate and be prolific when the workplace is a minefield for diversions. It might not be as undermining to switch activities within the same theme, but as a rule it takes 23 minutes and 15 seconds to get back on track, according to Gloria Mark, who studies digital distraction. People can be distracted by the demands of a job, but often they are distracted by self-interruptions, partly due to their attachment to their inbox, social media, and the need to know, but also because the prefrontal cortex of the brain has a novelty bias – human attention is easily pulled away by something shiny and new. The human dopamine system salivates for what's next.
- Switch tasking and self-interruptions cause us to be anxious which negatively affects our well-being. Constant, high levels of circulating stress hormones have an inflammatory and detrimental affect on brain cells. Adrenaline and cortisol are designed to support us through bursts of intense activity. But, in the long term, cortisol can cancel out the feel-good hormones, serotonin and dopamine, in the brain, which help us feel calm. Thus affecting sleep and heart rate and making us feel jittery.

▶ Attention Management is a Key Skill in Working Smart and Reclaiming Cognitive Health

Attention management is considered a key skill, especially today when so much work is done with the mind. “Attention management is the ability to control distractions, be present in your moments, maximize your focus, engage your flow, and ultimately, unleash your genius,” says Maura Thomas, the award-winning authority on attention management. Her work shows that people who can focus their attention for sustained periods of time regularly perform better on all sorts of cognitive challenges. On the job they get more done in less time. On a personal level, she notes, “Your attention determines the experiences you have, and the experiences you have determine the life you live.

Attention management is choosing where to aim your attention, focus and energy. Attention management strategies have the potential to change behaviours to reclaim the brain function and cognitive health that has been disrupted by multitasking and heavy use of digital media.

► Take Back Control of your Time and Energies

Time passes, no matter what you do. We all have the same twenty-four hours. You cannot make time go slower, faster, or start the clock again to add more of it. In working smart, time is not the problem. Allowing your attention and energy to be directed to distractions – even small ones – is the culprit. Misplaced attention interferes with your ability to achieve the results that are important to you. You can work smarter, with a lot less stress, by using attention management strategies. To be in control of your energies and be productive, pay attention what consumes your attention. Your ability to focus intensely on one thing at a time proves to have a more direct advantage in your efficiency, productivity, and overall well-being.

This is your opportunity to gain an advantage over those who try to be super-taskers or squander their time away. Attention management strategies work wonders beyond the confines of your working hours, allowing you to be fully present with other people, giving you quality time for self-care, quiet moments for insight or recharging your brain – basically providing more balance in your life.

► Four States of Mind

To take back control of your time and energies you have to be cognizant of your state of mind. Start by understanding and recognizing what your mental state is at any particular time. In your waking hours your energy is centered in one of four mental states:

1. **Reactive and Distracted State** – this is the typical mental state for most people. When you are switch-tasking, distracted by technology, putting out fires, procrastinating you basically lack control of your environment. This is a stressful state, not inherently bad, sometimes necessary, but it is counterproductive. You can choose to change your behaviours and environment so you can focus your attention to not to be in this state.
2. **Daydreaming State** – when it is totally free of distractions, the daydreaming state is restorative for your brain. It is healthy to daydream or let your mind wander and sometimes that kind of uninterrupted break is the most productive thing you can do. In those quiet moments you can gain insight, new ideas and solve problems. You can focus energy to be in this state.
3. **Flow State** – the most focused psychological state in which your brain works differently than the other three mind states. Flow opens vast reservoirs of resourcefulness, creativity, and energy. It is the perfect mental zone, where action, awareness and enjoyment merge. The activity floods your body with positive neurotransmitters and hormones that elevate your sense of well-being. In flow you are so fully immersed in the activity you don't think about hunger, comfort, boredom or time. Everything flows so seamlessly, you do not even realize how your energized concentration stretched your intelligence, skills, and emotional capabilities to the maximum. Full engagement gives you such a sense of confidence and personal control over the activity, you are strategically aware of your progress and feel the potential to succeed. This is not a state you can control. You cannot even aim for flow until you direct attention on the fourth state of "focused and mindful".

4. **Focused and Mindful** – in this state you are fully present, attention focused solely on what you are doing. Whether you are having a difficult conversation with a customer, responding to an email, or delivering a high-stakes presentation you are more aware of your thoughts and less reactive to them. When an emotion reaction is triggered you are more able to dispassionately observe that reaction in your mind and body and make a conscious choice about what to do next. That kind of focus is why mindfulness is a valued attribute among elite athletes and fighter pilots.

Upon recognizing your mental state, you decide where you want to be instead. You start by taking deliberate steps to do a transitional activity that engages another area of your brain for a few minutes before shifting into another mental state. Any type of relaxation or movement activity (music, walking, stretching, meditation, conversation on an unrelated subject, juggling) works when you are switching from a reactive state to a mindful zone that requires deep work and your aim is to achieve flow. Then you create a distraction free area, sit down, and place your attention on what you will do next.

► **Deliberate Attention – the Zone of Deep Work and Thoughtful Choices**

Knowing where attention should go isn't going to help if you can't stay there. Your attention is either selected and focused, or divided and unfocused. Think of it like the beam of a spotlight.

- You can maintain control of the spotlight and direct it wherever you wish to hold that bright space to zero in on something important.
- You can have a sloppy hold on the spotlight and move it erratically so all you get is a brief, fuzzy view of things as the light bounces from one place to another.

Attention management is the practice of using voluntary and conscious attention to zero in on what is important in your life. Mainly, it is being intentional about making thoughtful choices about what to do next, instead of constantly reacting to what's happening around you. These are choices in work, and life outside of work, being intentional about focusing on activities you specialize in and value most..

- Getting in the zone to think intensively and do deep work. Deep work is a state of distraction-free concentration that pushes your cognitive capabilities to their limit. Today, it is increasing rare to find people with the ability to do deep work. Apart from work-related tasks, deep work includes things like thinking deeply about your inspirations, self-awareness, life's tough issues, positive emotions, self-care, life-changing decisions or anything else that matters in your life. Deep work results in confidence that you are making thoughtful choices in all realms of your life and that you have a handle on all of it. You feel productive because you have done deep or valuable work, and feel good and empowered by your choices.
- Being in the zone so that you can enjoy a healthy quality private life outside of work. Even when you have a lot to do, deciding where to place your attention frees you from juggling work and your personal life. Your confidence in making thoughtful choices allows you to thoroughly disconnect from work so you can enjoy guilt-free private time – and engage with no second thoughts – with your family, leisure activities, and other personal pursuits.

► Attention Traps

Distractions eat up time. On average people use up 5-15 hours a week having their attention pulled away by inconsequential irrelevant, distractions that use up a lot of brain bandwidth and physical energy. Valuable work hours slip away and you only scratch the surface of being productive. Those can be demoralizing hours because you know you let distractions drag your attention away from what is most important. However when you are more consciously aware of attention traps you can employ strategies to limit or eliminate them, so you can use energies more meaningfully and productively.

► **Self-Perpetuating Cycle in the Reactive State** – in this state, you are already at the mercy of switch-tasking, responding to distractions, internal temptations to procrastinate, or putting out fires. That behavior doesn't always stop when you leave work. Many people stay trapped in a reactive zone because they lack control over their surroundings. Some like being in this state because every time an urgency presents itself they get to put out a fire and feel a rush of adrenaline. They enjoy the ego gratification of being the hero for the day, even though it is a false feeling of importance.

The reactive zone is comprised of activities that may be important or time sensitive, and you may care about them, but this is the most stressful zone to be in because you operate from deadline to deadline, fire to fire, and have little time for planning, strategic thinking, deep work, or meaningful personal time. The reactive zone is not necessarily all bad because you do need to respond to customers or employee demands, but if you are trapped in a self-perpetuating cycle it is counterproductive, and overtime you will not thrive personally or professionally.

► **Misuse of Time** – you can waste a lot of time in meaningless, trivial activities that are neither urgent nor important. They do not add value. Pointless meetings, activities that seem entertaining – they are just ways to procrastinate, especially when your priorities have not been clearly defined. It is also common to misuse time in mind-numbing activities when you do not know how to truly relax in a way that gives your brain time to recharge. Time can be wasted if you are ill-prepared. Think about the valuable time spent on a task that could be delegated, or simply eliminated.

► **Distractions and Interruptions** – many kinds of distractions or interruptions can claim your attention and squander time. Distractions can be sensory or emotional.

- Sensory distractions are distinct and immediate. When you do not work in a focus-friendly environment movement, noises or people can interrupt your flow. Self-distractions are also sensory – including your brain's enticing novelty bias and need for instant gratification. When you are leashed to your technology – inbox, social media, TV, app alerts, etc. – your dopamine system salivates for what's next and interrupts your flow and productivity.

DISTRACTION

Is that the thing that makes my job a little longer and more difficult

DISTRACTION

another meaningless message to keep me from what really matters

DISTRACTION

I'm always able to find really cool stuff

DISTRACTION

if I had a dime for every time I was distracted
that is a beautiful dog

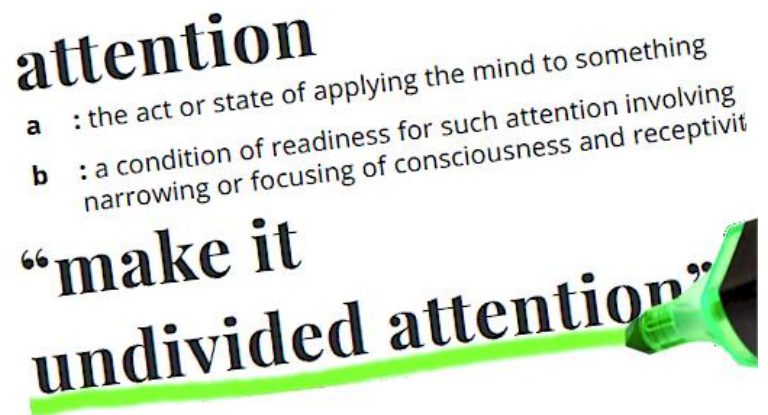
- Unless you are consciously aware, emotional distractions also consume your time and energy. One type of emotional distraction is your internal dialogue. Consciously or sub-consciously, that little voice in your head comments on life and what is going on around you, or what you are thinking. It is reflecting on past events, predicting the future, panicking under pressure, regurgitating things over and over. It runs all the time. When your mind veers off in its own direction, it can be difficult to guide it back to where you want to focus unless you pay attention to it and have the skill to manipulate it. Though a distraction, it can be a sign of fatigue, signaling time for a relaxation break.
- Another emotional distraction is what we call imprecise distractions which are a bit more challenging to explain. You may have placed a value on some things you thought you might wish to accomplish over time. In all likelihood, in speculating or day-dreaming, you did not take the time to clearly define how definitively important these things are to you. Due to your indecision they tend to pop in and out of your mind, and entice you to give them attention, indiscriminately and at inopportune times. Until you decide that a thing is a high priority and deserves your attention, these imprecise distractions are attention traps that derail your focus, time and energy from the most important things in your life.

Recognize the True Value of Undivided Attention

Many interruptions simply do not matter. There are a few reasons you may be easily distracted or interrupted. One reason is that you may not understand the true value of undivided attention and therefore do not prioritize protecting it, or prioritize giving it to someone else.

You may have not set boundaries to block out uninterrupted time for yourself. You may not quite distinguish what is urgent or time-sensitive from what is important and aligned with your values and priorities. Important tasks may not have a deadline, but they do have an impact that leads to you achieving your goals. When you react to urgent activities that demand your immediate attention they are usually associated with someone else's goals. The key is to be selective so you can give full attention to what is important to you – make it your undivided attention. It will be less stressful. Get into the habit of frequently asking yourself, “What is my attentional focus right now?”

Asking yourself where your attentional focus is can help bring your mind back to the present. Not only will it have an impact on your important work, it will help you when engaging with people. Besides being good manners and respectful, think of your true participation as your authentic gift to your significant other, your colleagues, your boss, staff or clients. Today, when not many people are described as being able to give their undivided attention, think of it as setting a good example, or this could be your competitive advantage.



► Zero in on What is Most Important

Rather than allowing distractions to derail and demoralize you, attention management strategies direct your attention to what is most important in your life. Of the many options in front of you, how do you know what to focus on? How do you determine the one thing that you should commit to doing?



All your choices of where to place your attention stem from your priorities. Once you have decided what is most important, keep your biggest objectives at the forefront of your mind to make it easier to ignore distractions that don't serve your top five goals.

To better answer that question, here's an example by way of Warren Buffet.

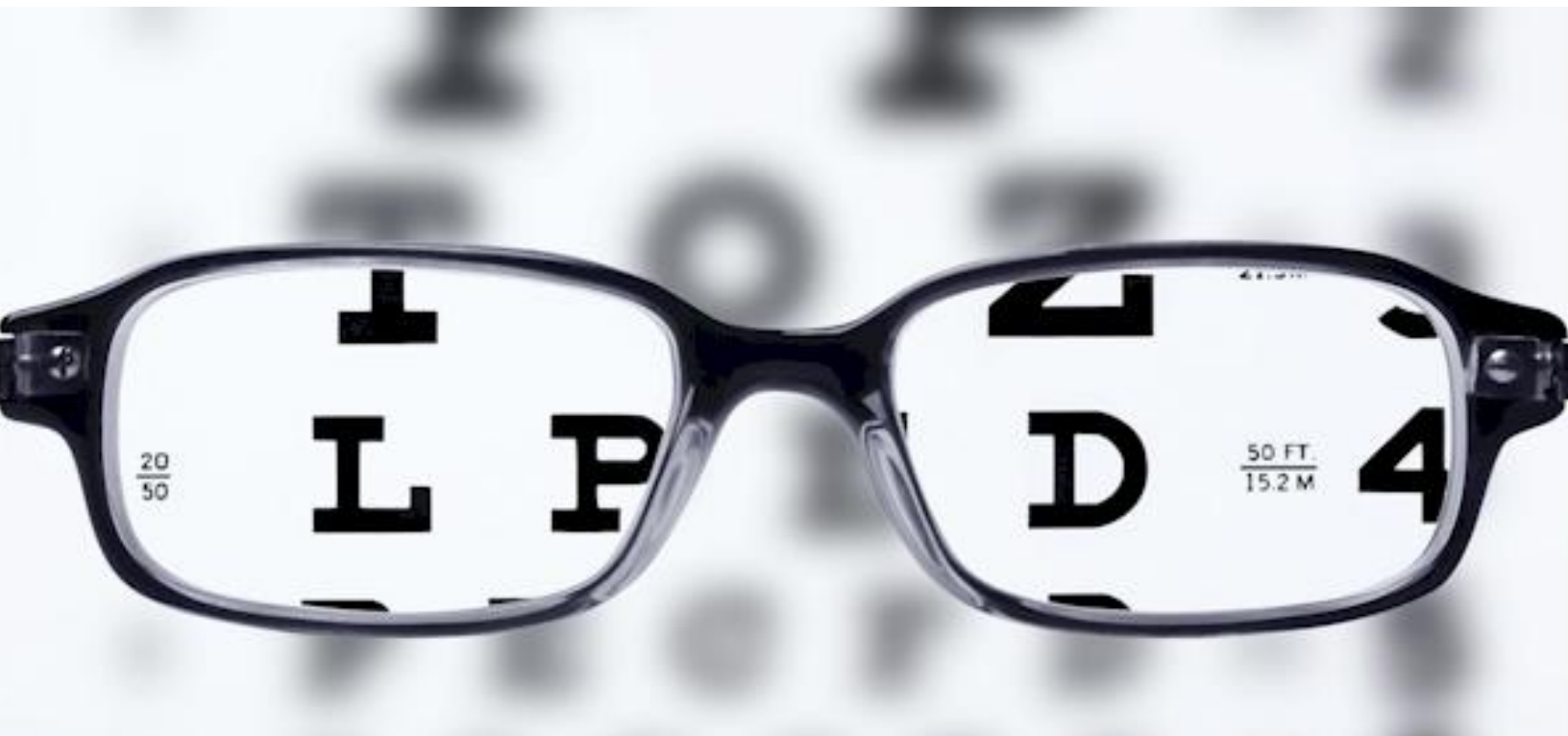
Buffett and his personal pilot, Mike Flint went through a strategy for focused attention. It had three steps. First, Buffett asking Mike to write down his top 25 career goals. Afterwards, Buffet asked him to review his list and decide which were his top five goals. When the pilot had narrowed it down, he had two lists. 1) his five most important goals, and 2) his twenty other things. He confirmed with Buffet that he would start working on his top 5 goals right away, and then Buffet asked, "What about the ones you didn't circle?" Flint replied that the top five were to be his primary focus and the other 20 were not urgent, but still important so he planned to give them dedicated effort. To which Buffett replied, "No. You've got it wrong, Mike. Everything you didn't circle just became your Avoid-At-All-Cost list. No matter what, these things get no attention from you until you've succeeded with your top five."

The key is to decide. Consciously zero in on what is most important. Your list could be major life goals or this week's important to do list. You could start with 15 things or 30 things. The point is you force yourself to make hard decisions and narrow it down to a small number. Then you stick to one simple rule: be consistent in avoiding everything else. It either is on a priority list or it is eliminated.

► Attention Management Employs Five Skills

► **Focus.** Focus is a big deal. Think of it like the zoom function on your camera. You are deliberate about where you put your attention, why, and for how long because you have an objective that matters.

Focus does not only apply to doing productive work. Sometimes it means not paying attention to work at all and making sure you are focused to engage in uninterrupted time with other people. You also need to resist distractions to focus on giving your brain time to recharge. Your brains use more energy than any other organs in your body. And, don't forget it is healthy to daydream or let your mind wander and that kind of uninterrupted break is the most productive thing you can do.



Focus is as much about what you are paying attention to as what you're blocking out. Steve Jobs said, "People think focus means saying yes to the thing you've got to focus on. But that's not what it means at all. It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas that there are. You have to pick carefully."

Focus on your life starts with giving priority to the people and projects that matter. When you do that it will not matter how long anything takes because you are focused on getting things done for the right reasons, in the right places and at the right moments. People who exercise attention management to be productive do not agonize about which desire to pursue. Since they prioritize their attention, their choices are easier. They are more able to pursue things that are personally interesting and socially meaningful. You can achieve great things through focus.

- ▶ **Concentration:** The ability to concentrate is the depth of your attention and your ability to hold it there for the duration of the task at hand. You synchronize and selectively control where your attention goes with your awareness of your situations as it develops. Actually concentration is the most universal of your natural tools and important for almost any endeavour you undertake. The productivity, accuracy, and excellence of any of your activities is enhanced through your ability to concentrate. Exercise, nutrition, and eating habits have an effect on how well you concentrate.
- ▶ **Mindfulness:** This is your ability to consciously experience your environment with all of your senses – touch, sound, sight, smell and taste so you are more alert to where you are and what you are doing, along with the inner workings of your thoughts and emotions. When you are mindful you are able to tune into what you are sensing without judgement, without rehashing the past or imagining the future, and you are not overly reactive or overwhelmed. If you have difficulty focusing your attention, you can practice mindfulness exercises that involve breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress. To truly engage other human beings and create meaningful connections, we need to silence our inner voices and be fully present — and being more mindful can help.
- ▶ **Presence:** Are you surprised that presence is a skill? Due to our many distractions, presence is not something we do naturally or easily. We seem to be afraid of a moment with nothing to read, say or do. When we look around we see people busying themselves instead of taking a moment to be still or quiet. In a public venue, park, or restaurant, the only people not on a cell phone are the babies in strollers, who are keenly aware of everything happening around them. Even in a business meeting, often people are not always present or really listening when someone is speaking. They can be distracted by their technology and are unable to silence their inner voices. The thing is we instinctively know when someone is not present, when we feel unheard. That disconnect is evident, no matter how subtle it may appear. Presence and mindfulness are keen partners. Together it simply means you take an extra moment to be aware of the rest of your life so you don't miss anything. You can hone this skill a minute here and there multiple times per day – looking around a room, noticing the people, the surroundings, the sounds, your heartbeat, the folds of your skin, the shadows on a wall, or other human beings.
- ▶ **Flow:** Flow is different than daydreaming, resting or switch-tasking. You cannot command yourself to enter that state of flow. It can only be achieved when your focus, concentration, mindfulness and presence orchestrate full engagement, your undivided attention, with whatever you are focused on – working on an interesting project, playing a sport, dancing, a hobby, etc. You have to practice the other four skills to reach this perfect mental place. Psychologists call it “finding flow”. Athletes call it “being in the zone”. Musicians are in “a state of flow”. Gardeners are “in tune with nature”. Software programmers are “wired in”. Stock market traders are “in the pipe”. Poker players “play the A-game”. Artists call it “the muse”. What they have in common is two-fold. First they know what needs to be done and how well they are doing. Second, whether they reach their goal or not, is not important – whatever produces that flow, the “high” of the experience, becomes its own reward. They derive happiness from personal development and growth to do it again and again.

Self-Control and Energy are Intricately Linked

Researchers at the University of Nottingham conducted 83 separate studies to explore energy and self-control. What they found could very well change the way you start your day. Your energy levels go through a natural ebb and flow throughout the day. “The researchers found that self-control and energy are not only intricately linked but also finite, that human daily resources tire much like a muscle. When you get busy you may not realize that as the day goes on, you have increased difficulty exerting self-control and focusing on your work. As self-control wears out, you feel tired and find tasks to be more difficult and your mood sours. This leads to less productivity.

During those hours when your self-control is highest, are the most important hours of your work day. This is the time to set aside the uninterrupted block of time for focusing. “It is doing the right things in the morning that makes your energy and self-control last longer.” You still have to fit in regular breaks to give your brain time to recharge.

Structure your best deep work based on when you know your productivity curve it at its highest. Your energy level is a basic reminder that you cannot do it all, and that you should be strategic in how you plan your day. On a more complex level, it provides you a roadmap for designing the perfect work day based on your own rising and falling productivity.

Work Smart to Break the Cycle

How can you break the cycle and protect your attention, focus, and time? Attention management involves more than one strategy and may require adjustments in your routine and mindset.

- **First, stop trying to multitask.** Period. Switch-tasking is tempting, but the pressures and negatives of switch-tasking can set your whole day back. Research shows that it takes 20 to 40 percent longer to complete a group of tasks while multitasking—with nearly twice as many errors. If you think you have a gift or are an exception because you were raised using multiple devices and apps, we are sorry to burst your bubble. It is extremely rare that a person can do two concentrated tasks at once without compromising one of them. The more things you try to juggle at the same time, the less effective you become because of the time and attention lost when mentally switching from one activity to the next.
- **Be intentional about your time** – of course you do not want to let anyone down, but if you say yes to everything, you will not be able to give 100% to everything. Your time has a value. You can eliminate, delegate, say no, or decide it has importance and put it on your schedule. That includes choosing a time to unplug after work to set work-life boundaries and to effectively recover.
- **Stay connected to the why.** What about this task or activity makes it important? Who does it affect? How will it makes things better?
- **Use attention management strategies will help you work smarter.** Be deliberate in directing attention to the ways and times your brain works best.

► Attention Management Strategies

► Commit to your Priorities by Setting up Appointments

Your brain works best when you give it direction. One of the best things you can do is create a focused daily schedule that promotes single-tasking, and stick to it.

Stephen Covey, author of *First Things First*, describes efficiency is a jet airplane traveling at 600 miles per hour. Effectiveness is a jet airplane flying at 600 miles per hour ... in the right direction.



You probably place a high value on your effectiveness and your ability to keep your commitments. Meetings with clients take priority on your schedule. Your commitment to attention and effectiveness dictates that your daily calendar accurately reflects the important activities toward which you want to direct your attention. Essentially, on a daily basis you stop, think, and decide what activities will get your attention. You make an appointment with yourself to commit to things like project work, creative time, reading, decision-making, strategic thinking, paperwork or play time. You can designate times when you are open to interruptions or to do routine tasks. This way, disruption will not affect the quality of your work as much.

You should consider these regular appointments with yourself as important as appointments with your most valuable customer. It is your assurance to get those tasks done. To make it easier, keep your calendar obvious, so you can see it at a glance. Keeping those appointments requires discipline. You will need to tell your staff or coworkers, "I have to go now; I have an appointment."

► Minimize Distractions

Build focus in your day by minimizing sensory and emotional distractions so you can stick to your schedule. To make changes, create a focus friendly environment for your work where you are free to focus on just one thing. Clutter, external noises, and people can deter you from focus. Minimize the clutter. Wear headphones if you cannot eliminate the outside noise. Put up a do-not-disturb sign. Hide your technology if you cannot ignore it.

Keep to the simple rule. Emergencies and unexpected distractions will arise. Ignore them as much as possible, deal with them when you must, and get back to your schedule as soon as possible.

► Break Down Tasks and Designate Stopping Points

When you decide it's time to do a task, and you've eliminated potential interruptions, do that task, until it is finished or until you reach a stopping point for a break. Do not watch the clock. Set a timer instead. If it's one big task, break it into attainable pieces, the completion of which become your designated

stopping points. Hone in on each with your full attention until they're finished. When you set a timer you decide you're going to direct all your attention to completing what you can in that time frame.

► **Fit in Real Breaks**

They are extremely important. Studies show we work best in 90 – 120 minute cycle of alertness before we need a mental break. When your body signals you that the 90 minute boundary has been crossed, disengage to go for a walk away from the computer, the office, the work environment, technology. Checking email, making a work related phone call, researching a question all count as work, not a break. You have to do something different and refreshing to help your brain reset or recharge. A real break takes your mind away from what you're doing completely. A different environment like the outdoors or a different room looking at the outdoors does that. Pretend you are going to a meeting, but instead of people you are meeting with trees.

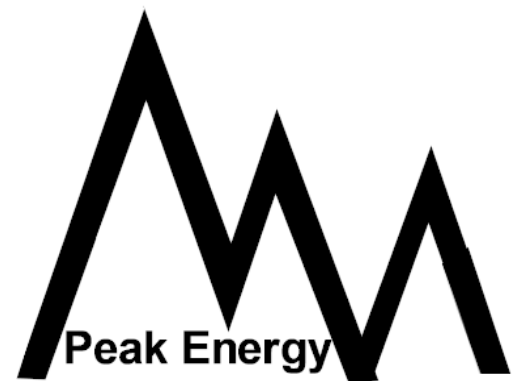
► **Deliberate Rest**

Recharge and strengthen your focus through deliberate rest. Recharging does not come from real breaks by themselves. You need deliberate rest or relaxation. We do not mean sleeping the required hours your body needs. Deliberate rest is immersing yourself in activities that are engaging and mentally stimulating, ones that keep your attention, but do not overtax your brain. You can give your brain a boost of energy through hobbies, leisure activities, family time, playing a musical instrument, cooking, or reading to name a few.

► **Stop Fighting Against your Body's Natural Ebbs and Flows**

Your body's energy has its own path and you are naturally more energetic and motivated at specific times of the day. Work with it. Decide that you will focus on single tasking and deep work when you have peak energy

- Determine the hours you are most productive and plan to do your most intense work without interruptions at that time. Go offline when you need to focus on your most important work. Leave non-essentials until you have done some important work.
- Let the people in your life and organization know what this time is dedicated for. Encourage them to do the same. Better yet, when you interact with people on a daily or weekly basis, it is better to educate them to adopt new approaches and routines like this.
- Create a clear workspace that removes the reminders of non-essential work that might draw your attention away from deep work.
- Identify your distracters and limit or eliminate as many as possible. Ignore your phone, messages and email during deep work. Schedule chunks of time for those items outside that time.
- When you choose a task to work on, focus on what you "should" do, not what you "could" do.



► **Create a Ritual**

Your brain responds to ritual. Rituals act as confidence boosters while lessening anxiety. They help your brain adapt to a change in concentration. A morning ritual signals a fresh start to the day. A night ritual help you reflect on the day. A ritual such as a short walk or cup of tea signals your brain you are ready to focus on deep work. Create a ritual when it is time to give someone your undivided attention. Put your phone in a drawer, clear space on your desk, close your laptop, move to a conference table. Do something personal and meaningful to you. It creates a vivid image of respect for the other person.

► **To Work Smarter Control your Thoughts**

For many of us, this is difficult. Our minds do wander. Practice noticing when your mind is veering off in its own direction, and gently guide your focus back to where you want it. If you think of some small task while you are doing focused work, jot it down on a notepad and come back to it later. Do the same with information you want to look up online. Another technique is to consciously think 'I wonder what my next thought will be'. Whether this disrupts your internal dialogue, or just distracts your brain, it seems to give some space for the brain to become aware of what's happening.

► **Be Intentional about Hitting the Pause Button on your Technology.**

Because of technology, it's easy to let other things or people decide where your attention goes. If you exist in a constant state of alertness, think about your motivations. Are you afraid you will be disliked/unloved/fired if you fail to respond immediately? In the short term, you may adapt reasonably well to the demands of this always-on, anywhere, anytime, anyplace behaviour. But, in the long term the stress hormones create a physiological hyper-alert state that is always scanning for stimuli, provoking a sense of addiction temporarily assuaged by checking in to the latest alert.

We are not suggesting you stop cold turkey. Attention management offers an alternative – be thoughtful about the timing of those distractions.

- There is little benefit to being notified every time a message comes through. It only takes a small amount of time to configure your notifications and filters, and then update the settings periodically.
- Email and texts are useful, but callers and texters should not control your schedule. You should be the one who decides when you return texts, respond to emails, or engage in a phone call.
- Open only one window on your computer screen and give your full attention to one task until it is complete, or until you reach a designated stopping point.
- Try to “unplug” completely from you technology for at least an hour or more, as often as you can. Try it for fifteen minutes at first, then build up to longer. Turn on the TV when you already know what it is you want to watch. Lock away your technology when you are doing important activities.
- At the end of each day be proud that you were able to choose not to place attention on the unimportant things that tempted you.

► **Strengthen your brain's ability to focus**

Remember: you can improve your ability to focus through practicing and committing to the process

Keep in mind that change is not a event but a process, so it will take time to strengthen your brain's ability to focus. We often categorize success as a single event. For instance, people will say, "If I lose 20 pounds, I'll be in shape." Or, "if I can get my business featured in the major newspapers I'll have the exposure and credibility I need." Those events are not what makes success, it is the commitment to the process that gets you there.

It will take time to maximize your attention management skills.

Habits are formed by routine. Habits are basically memories that we retrieve on autopilot. When you commit to the process of integrating all the previous work smart practices you are giving yourself new memories that serves you better. Once you've done a specific routine many times, your brain associates the cue with the behavior, and a habit is formed. The more you perform the routine, the stronger the habit and a new autopilot will supersede.

- Asking yourself where your attention is focused can help bring your mind back to the present.
- When you find yourself thinking negatively or worrying excessively, pick up a pen and write down three good things about your day. It will change your perspective and get you back to the task at hand.
- At the end of each work day, prioritize a list of five so you know exactly what you will work on first thing tomorrow. Work until the first task is finished before moving on to the second task. Unfinished items move to the new list for the next day. Do this everyday.
- Being consistent may be the toughest part.

Inspired and Committed, We Celebrate Your Journey

At Corro, we believe in the power of people. We are inspired to expand humanity's capacity for wisdom, compassion, and courage.

In our commitment to helping you achieve long-term personal development and use your organizational platform for positive impact, we celebrate the journey of lifelong learning while fostering an all-inclusive community driven environment of meaning, personal connection, and fun.

Corro is not just a Work Space – Our Aim is Helping the Community Thrive through People Success