

Half The Skill of Focus is Learning What to Ignore

How you spend your attention is how you spend your time

Many of us struggle with focus and attention.

We are bombarded with distractions and temptations that pull us away from what we should be doing. This is especially true online, where there is more opportunity for distraction than ever before.

If you feel rushed and over-stressed, you may be missing out on some great ways to improve your focus, not just in the office but also at home.

In our hyperconnected world, we're exposed to a constant stream of information. Whether at work, home, or anywhere in between, there are always new sights and sounds vying for our attention.

With the constant distractions of the modern world, staying focused isn't easy. Sometimes it can feel as though your attention span is decreasing rather than increasing over time.

Unfortunately, our brains respond to these distractions by releasing dopamine, a chemical that gives us a feeling of pleasure and rewards us for responding to the many distractions every day.

The more we respond to distractions, the stronger the response becomes and the harder it is to ignore future temptations.

That's why so many people find it challenging to stay focused — it feels almost unnatural! It's also why improving your ability to focus is helpful in nearly every area of life. **The ability to tune out distractions can help you get more done and achieve your goals.**

There are two types of distractions, **external distractions** (everything around you that take your mind away from deep focus) and **internal distractions** (mental chatter or mind-wandering that interrupt your focused work).

The ability to focus is a skill. And like any skill it can be improved. "Focus is a skill that can become a habit with practice and control," says Eric Lofholm.

A lot of things can keep you from focusing on the task at hand. Phone notifications, emails, people moving around you and a million other things can distract you.

But what if you could learn to ignore those distractions? What if you could train yourself to tune out the world and focus on what's in front of you?

The key to success is starving your distractions and feeding your focus.

When it comes to improving your focus, most people think of meditation or mindfulness. These are excellent practices that we should all be doing more often. **The goal is to be able to notice when your mind starts to wander and then gently bring yourself back to the present moment.**

However, they are not the only ways to improve your concentration and reduce distractions. There is something else that you can do, which is just as valuable when reducing stress and increasing productivity.

It's called ignoring. It's harder than it sounds.

You can improve your focus by learning to ignore things, especially urgent but unimportant emails and notifications.

Once you commit to a task, see it through first. Of course, this is easier said than done, but it is possible.

Honing your ability to ignore distractions remove unimportant distractions from your mind so you can concentrate on what's important.

You should learn not to take everything so seriously. Learn to prioritise and focus on your most important tasks and things.

Everything else should be secondary. Start your day with a must-do list, and until you check them off, don't take other tasks seriously. Get a noise-cancelling headphones — it eliminates 90 percent of the external distractions.

Meta-awareness can also help you overcome mind-wandering.

“The antidote for mind wandering is meta-awareness, attention to attention itself, as in the ability to notice that you are not noticing what you should, and correcting your focus. **Mindfulness makes this crucial attention muscle stronger,**” explains Daniel Goleman in his book, *Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence*.

If your mind gets overloaded pretty quickly, you are operating at peak stress levels seven days a week, or you're constantly being distracted by everything around you, it pays to embrace new habits that can break the chain.

Improving your ability to ignore things has brain and productivity benefits. Loss of concentration and attention fragmentation are doing more harm to our productivity than we think.

The good news is that you can take back control.

Commitment to practices like ignoring unnecessary information, starving distractions from notifications, mindfulness and meta-awareness can improve your focus skills.

“Stay focused, ignore the distractions, and you will accomplish your goals much faster,” says Joel Osteen.

How you spend your attention is how you spend your time. Improving your focus will not only save you time it will also improve your productivity.

You can't always control the outcome, but you can control your focus.