

The Worklife Journey: Journal

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Paying Attention to What We Pay Attention To

Life consists of what we pay attention to. If we focus on meaningful, positive things, we'll have a meaningful, positive life. If we focus on meaningless, negative things, we'll have a meaningless, negative life. This is simplistic and also enduringly profound: one of life's great truths.

"Our experience is what we attend to." —William James

Organizational ADHD

If we chronically multi-task and engage in scattered thoughts, we will have scattered, chaotic lives. The fast-paced world we live in is filled with distraction and noise and can produce symptoms very much like ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). We are constantly bombarded by information, e-mail, phone calls and news. In the January 2005 issue of Harvard Business Review, Edward Hallowell, a renowned researcher and practicing psychiatrist who has specialized in ADHD treatment for 25 years, reports the rise of a new, more subtle problem he sees – ADT (Attention Deficit Trait). He has documented this in the workplace along with the advent of increased communications devices and the overload of useless data. The core symptoms are distractibility, inner frenzy and impatience. Sound familiar? The condition is brought on by the never-ending demand on our time and attention that have exploded in the last two decades. The familiar "suck it up and move on" only makes it worse. Enduring the tidal wave of tasks, we become increasingly curt and unfocused while pretending that everything is ok. Don't dare ask for help!

"We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts."— Buddha

Concentration

Concentration helps us focus on and in the moment, instead of frantically rushing from moment to moment.

The Pareto Principle says that 80 percent of our results arise from only 20 percent of our efforts. That means that only about 20 percent of our activities actually provide the results we are looking for.

This is true for business as well as for social and family activities. In that case, if we devote more time and energy to the crucial 20 percent of our activities, we would accomplish more, have better relationships, and more life satisfaction. However, in order to do so, we would have to prioritize, focus and concentrate. This means we would have to say "no" to the people, places and things that are distractions from our goals and real purpose in life and work.

Five Keys to Concentration

In today's distracting environments, it is not easy to stay focused. Here are five essential keys to concentration and focus.

1. Single-mindedness. Focusing on one task at a time is difficult because we all have so many things to do. It means we have to temporarily ignore some things in favor of others. Deferring other projects doesn't mean they're not important, only less so for the moment. It requires making choices as to priorities and scheduling.

2. Mental willpower. Harnessing and directing our thoughts, focusing on what is needed, and saying "no" to outside distractions. Can you think of a time when you were so engrossed in an activity that you became one with it? All sense of time disappeared. All outside activities were unnoticed. Athletes call this the zone. Others, a state of flow. In our coaching practice, we use the Birkman information on your passions and needs to help you better manage your attention to stay productive. Our theory is that as you are drawn into situations that erode your sense of wellbeing, your stress and distractibility increases. With insight into your unique needs, you can better manage and



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The Art of Being MindFULL

You might be saying, "How **do** I concentrate and stay focused on one thing at a time when the world is coming at me at Warp 10"? By staying in the moment. Ever hear that before?

Even if we hear it daily, it's something we need to be reminded of on a regular basis. Again you may ask, "But how **do** I **do** that"? In this case it's not about **doing**. It's about **being**. Being mindFULL is having the ability to **be** in the present moment. Once we're in the present moment, concentration happens naturally without even thinking about it.

I'm certainly not immune to distractions either. The demands on all of us are huge. "Shall I go downstairs and start the washing machine and then fold the clothes that have been in the dryer from days ago"? - "Is my much needed morning coffee ready to go for the morning?" (Oh boy - just what I need more caffeine!) - "Are my kids staying on task with their homework?" - "Mom - Can you take me to the

3. Interest in action. At times, the mind can be unruly, like a rebellious teenager. We must develop the ability to say to our mind “no, not right now,” and carry on. Realize that your mind is oriented naturally to what you enjoy, find interesting and feel passionate about. Look for ways to connect with those things in your everyday life and work and say “yes” through them to what is going on. For instance, if you are like me and love to talk and find out about people, use time in meetings to truly observe the actions and emotions of others. Really listen to what they are saying and how they are saying it. You might want to even make notes! You'll be amazed at how interesting the meeting becomes to you and you might even find that others are encouraged by your attention. (Careful – no staring!)

4. Perseverance. The ability to persist in spite of distraction, opposition and discouragement is critical to attaining what we want in life. That means coming back after getting distracted. It also means completing an activity even though it may not be perfect. It includes the ability to keep on in spite of making mistakes. It is keeping on keeping on, persisting, correcting, learning and coming back. An interesting mental exercise is to simply close your eyes and focus completely on some simple thing like a pencil. Start with the eraser and move slowly through the entire imagined pencil, keeping all outside influences out. Try to do this for a minute or even 30 seconds! You'll be amazed at how difficult it can be at first.

5. Mindfulness. Time, when we think back over our life, is not really remembered in days, months, years, but rather in moments. Even more specifically, those moments in which our thoughts, interests, and emotions were fully engaged in a person, place or process. If we reframe our concept of time, we can remove our compulsion to race through life. Instead of thinking there's never enough time, we realize we have all the time we're going to get ...right now. We come to understand the best way to make the most of our time is to make the most of this moment.

library tomorrow night?" "When can I fit in exercise again?" - "Can I stretch that proposal deadline another day?" "When will my husband and I get some time together?" And the beat goes on

Part of being mindFULL is to better manage our perception of what's actually going on. Is this a list of doom or a list of opportunities? Is this a "to do list" or a "thank you list"? The answer lies in my perception of the daily list of life - "I have nice clothes". "I can afford Starbucks coffee". "The kids are doing pretty well in a wonderful school". "I'm healthy and I exercise". "The proposal is almost done". "My husband and I are planning something for the weekend". Great beats in the daily rhythm of life get skipped over when I'm not listening.

I am looking over at the calendar and I see how short February is. 28 days??? It is hard to imagine fitting an entire month's worth of work into less time. I could sure use a leap year right about now. In spite of my fear, the solution is the same. Take a moment to *be* in the moment and smell the coffee - the richness of life! Add up each of those moments, and your to-do lists have become gratitude lists! On your mark, get set and gather paper, a pen, pencil, or crayons to make your list. Switch to being in the moment and listening for your own beat rather than the insane beat around you. That's being mindFULL!

The Power of Now

One of the most pernicious and destructive distraction routines is worry. Worry and the anxiety that accompanies it can and does erode self confidence and focus. Worry by its very nature is “now” energy applied to either the past or the future. When it is over the past, it is closely aligned with regret. When on the future, it is a projection of potential danger or threat that is usually not real. It is also a projection of our perceived inability to deal with it. This is when good, clear affirmations can be really effective. A simple “it will be fine and I’ll be able to handle it when I get there” can position your mind and emotions to stay in the present, focused on the task at hand. Try it, you’ll like it.

We close this month with one of my favorite meditations. It is an ancient Sanskrit proverb and knowing that millions of others have spent countless hours contemplating it gives me a strange comfort – I’m not the only one nor are we the first people to struggle with these challenges.

**LOOK TO THIS DAY, FOR IT IS LIFE, THE VERY LIFE OF LIFE.
IN ITS BRIEF COURSE LIE ALL THE REALITIES & VERITIES OF EXISTANCE –
THE BLISS OF GROWTH, THE SPLENDOR OF ACTION, THE GLORY OF POWER.
FOR YESTERDAY IS BUT A DREAM AND TOMMORROW IS ONLY A VISION.
BUT TODAY, WELL LIVED, MAKES
EVERY YESTERDAY A DREAM OF HAPPINESS,
AND EVERY TOMORROW A VISION OF HOPE.
LOOK WELL, THEREFORE, TO THIS DAY**

Movie	Book	Website
Baby Boom	Take Your Time by Eknath Easwaran	Don't Sweat