

A FRESH PERSPECTIVE FOR TODAY'S LEADERS

# engaging the edges

*Focus Issue*

Featuring tips to increase attention management and support your team.



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# what matters most

This is the second issue of our new *Engaging the Edges* digital magazine, created to bring you the latest trends in leadership and performance, best practices from our years of work in the field, stories, ideas, and hopefully inspiration to elevate your experience @ work – and in life. If you missed the first issue, check your inbox, access via the InteraWorks Learning Experience Platform (LXP), or let us know and we will provide you with the link.

There is so much information that is accessible by the push of a button these days. Our goal with this publication is to curate content for you that follows a new theme each quarter. We want to create awareness and share thought leadership from our team and clients in a high-quality piece that you come back to more than once and that you are proud to share. I hope *Engaging the Edges* makes the cut in your library and becomes a consistent, never-miss part of your reading journey.

**Our theme for the quarter is focus.** Focus can mean so many different things depending on the person and circumstances or even the moment. What we know for sure at InteraWorks is what you focus on is what you get and that you cannot focus on more than one thing at a time. Now just sit with that for a minute. What has been your focus today? Does it match up with where you want to go – with what matters most to you? How often have you focused on just one thing at a time today?

We only have so many minutes in the hour and so many hours in the day. We have many activity metrics in our businesses and our lives – proposals submitted, miles per gallon, steps completed, etc. I wonder though what would happen if we tracked our focus, both where our attention is and the number of things that get our focus over a certain incremental period? Like much of our performance research and discovery at InteraWorks, I bet the results would be both discouraging and transformative.

For this day, for this hour.... focus on what matters to you most, stick with it and enjoy the fulfillment that comes from deep work. We will be cheering you on all the way.

Sincerely,

*Laurie Oswald, CEO*



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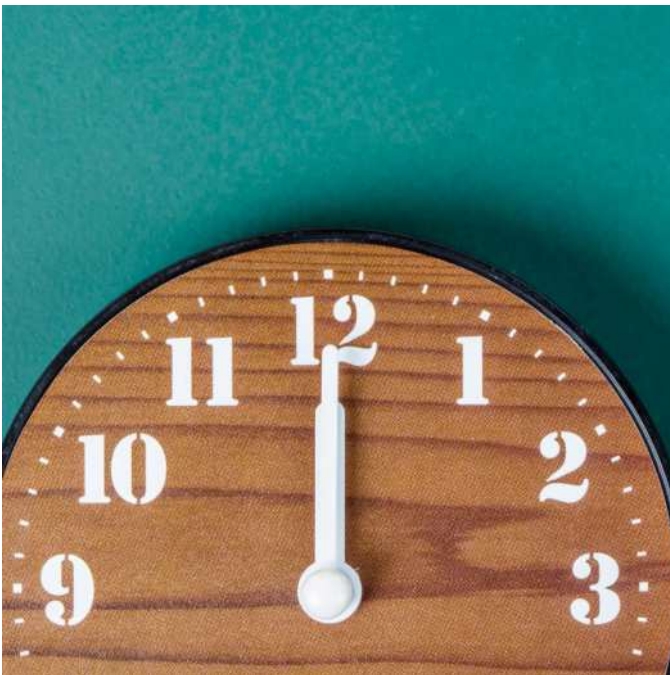
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You get more  
of what you focus on.





# Reclaim Your Attention

## Learning to Manage Distractions

Anne McGhee-Stinson, Managing Partner

Every one of us is endowed with a certain amount of attention and energy and that allotment varies at any given time. Compare the condition of your attention after you have been up all night to when you've had a good night's sleep and feel refreshed.

Or notice how easily your attention becomes exhausted if you are asked to pat your head and rub your belly while counting backward from 1,000 by fours. If you have ever heard yourself say, "Don't bother me right now," it's probably because your allotment of attention has been spent (\$).

Our attention is a limited resource and just like our finances, it is vitally important that we learn to manage it well. After all, we do have to pay (\$) attention to the things that matter most to us; but we also know how challenging that can be at times.

Distractions are the single greatest challenge draining (\$) our attention; costing (\$) us precious time and energy. There are several types of common distractions and learning to manage them is key to effectively reclaiming our attention and energy.

**Physical distractions** including noise from the outside world (horns honking, fans blowing, email pinging) and visual distractions such as clutter, all withdraw (\$) precious units of our attention. Limit physical distractions by turning off the email ping, closing the door, cleaning the desk off, or turning off the noisy fan.

**Physiological distractions** such as hunger, lack of sleep, stress, or emotional upset all cost (\$) us our attention. Our brains are designed to ensure our survival and these physiological distractions activate our survival response, making any challenge seem so much worse than it is.

These brain mechanisms are there to help you survive, so Eat, Relax, Rest, and Regulate (ERRR!) instead of trying to power through it.

**Cognitive distractions** include what is going on between your ears while you are trying to focus. For example, do you think about work while on holiday or think about an upcoming holiday while at work? In either case, your full attention isn't available, and you may be missing out on what is going on.

This is the biggest area of distraction for most of us, and happily the one we have the most control over. Cognitive distractions are a bit like having a hole in your money bag as you walk down the street. You are slowly draining a limited resource and you may find you have nothing left to spend just when you need it the most.

Here are seven simple strategies you can invest (\$) in to save (\$) your attention:

- Do a Mind-Sweep to clear your mind
- Break down a larger task/project into smaller bite-size pieces
- Create Procedures and Protocols
- Take a break
- Plan ahead – Block time on your calendar
- Practice heart-focused breathing
- Meditate

Remember, where we place our attention is where we place our energy. What are you paying (\$) attention to?

You wouldn't spend your hard-earned money on low-value merchandise, so why allow your attention to be spent on low-value distractions?



# InteraWorks Transforms Conflict Resolution into **Solutions@Work**

## *Create an Aligned Workforce*

Our new Solutions@Work program keeps its focus on the many variables that come into play for teams, including levels of diversity in background, experiences, points of view, approaches to communication, and overall communications skills.

The result is a strong effective path to reframing conflict and keeping team members (and their projects) moving forward in alignment.

To learn more about Solutions@Work, contact us:  
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# Three Components of True Motivation



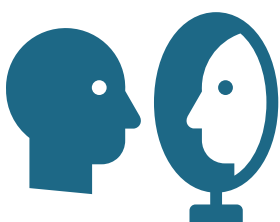
Michelle Santaferarro, Facilitator

Have you ever joined a gym as a New Year's resolution and then by March found your energy waning and your parking spot empty?

If you have experienced motivation coming in fits and starts, you may be surprised to discover there is more to motivation than just sheer determination. What if I told you there is a kind of motivation that breeds self-esteem, feeds our relationships, and brings a greater sense of well-being? Maybe, like me, you want to experience the kind of motivation that impacts your professional life and spills over into your personal life.

Let us hold these past defeats in the light of a new paradigm that author Daniel Pink explains in his book, "Drive". He believes that true motivation and true drive have three components.

## Autonomy



At its base level, autonomy is about being self-directed. It may sound like doing what you want and when you want, but it has other facets.

Daniel Pink describes it differently than just dogged independence. He defines it as "...acting with a choice – which means we can be autonomous and happily interdependent with others." One of the most notable examples in Drive describes how programmers became inspired to participate in open-source projects. They had the

liberty to work on these projects at their discretion and many of them continued to do so outside their work hours. Three German economists who studied open-source projects discovered that the programmers' motivation was fueled by (1) their sheer joy in "mastering a challenge of a given software problem" and (2) their "desire to give a gift to their programming community."

Giving workers this kind of autonomy bred continued engagement and revealed a connectedness to their community of colleagues. Giving workers this kind of autonomy bred continued engagement and revealed a connectedness to their community of colleagues.

## Mastery



Mastery is "the desire to get better and better at something that matters." Pink states that there are two different factors necessary to build mastery in something: flow and progress.

You might have heard of the term 'flow' which comes from the work by Csikszentmihalyi [pronounced "chick-sent-me-high"]. He studied 'play' by observing dedicated artists, rock climbers, swimmers, just to name a few. He discovered that when they were at their peak of being stretched just a bit beyond their mental and physical capabilities, there was this characteristic of hyper-focused attention, almost like that of being in a trance. He defined this as 'flow.'

“In flow, people lived so deeply in the moment and felt so utterly in control, that their sense of time, place, and even self, melted away. “The second part of mastery involves a need to see progress. When folks were able to make progress on things that mattered, they were engaged and motivated to do more.

### Ideology



Human beings desire to make a significant contribution and to have a purpose in what they do. This can be compensated or uncompensated. Part of this contribution, many times, will be for a cause that is greater and longer lasting than themselves.

Pink observed a unique characteristic in those who reached tremendous success or achievement simply for the money itself or the fame that followed. He discovered that emptiness lingered. The common theme that bred this emptiness was a lack of connection to a greater purpose. In other words, money and fame without purpose were not great motivators.

**The good news is that  
motivation can be  
cultivated.**

For example, I can now hold my own in pursuit of learning a foreign language (Italian) up to the light of these elements. I have great autonomy in ‘how’ and ‘when’ I can carve out time to learn which makes it attainable. I have two programs that allow me to dedicate 20-minute intervals of language study.

I can test my progress by occasionally watching a foreign film entirely in Italian or, like this morning, join a language class with other students to check my understanding. These quarterly opportunities are little milestones that indicate I am following more of the conversation and making progress which fuels me to learn even more. I have also been able to tie this pursuit to a larger purpose. Much of the culture of Italy is about family, food, olive oil, and wine. Yet, I long to talk about matters of the heart with my foreign friends; my real motivation for learning Italian in the first place

**Do you have a pursuit  
where your motivation  
is waning?**

Consider weaving autonomy, mastery, and ideology into your pursuit. Through this newfound lens, perhaps the original motivation will be reignited.

**THINK  
ABOUT  
THINGS  
DIFFERENTLY**



# Is Email a Leadership Issue?

Anne McGhee-Stinson, Managing Partner

## Consider this question: Is email a leadership issue?

In a word - yes. In a few words - it's a big issue.

Human beings have a limited amount of attention and energy to spend at any given time. We are so inundated with complexity, information, and data, that our attention becomes exhausted.

## Short Term Tactical or Long Term Strategic?

From a leadership perspective, this can translate into the inability to access innovation, creativity, intelligent risk-taking, decision-making, and the full performance potential of our teams. It can also mean we are missing opportunities for strategic connections, deepening relationships, mentoring, coaching, guiding, and so forth. That, my friends, is a high price to pay to get a few emails done.

**Email is a leadership issue because it has a direct, immediate, and relentless impact on the way leaders focus their attention and energy.**

**For many, getting the time needed to do the deeper thinking required for creative strategy and planning is a thing of the past.**

Instead, leaders can spend inordinate amounts of time in short-term, tactical, transactional communications

represented by the ever-increasing inbox and back-to-back meetings. It can make for a transactional kind of leader—one who becomes a taskmaster instead of a visionary leader we so desperately need right now.

We live in a world where people have access to the greatest technology and tools that have ever existed. At the same time, however, people are more overwhelmed and disengaged than ever before. A gigantic breakthrough in our thinking is sorely needed. It has become a priority to free up **mental capacity** for leaders and their teams to be able to manage this flow; innovate and stay creative.

*“In order to maximize performance and achieve potential, there has been a concerted focus on the development of capability: skills and behavioral competencies. This is true at all levels, from teamwork, sales, and customer service to management and leadership development. The development of capability does not, however, address the **aspect of capacity**: the ability to process, store and integrate these capabilities and apply them effectively. It is through attention to our cognitive processes (**FOCUS**) that we can enhance our mental capacities.... The combination of developing both capability and capacity is seen as the next level of performance enhancement.”*

- **Neuro Leadership Journal**

When we allow our attention and energy to be consumed by the short-term sense of urgency in our external environment, it leaves us without the capacity to access our inner, more strategic, creative, and innovative resources which leaves us at the mercy of events and circumstances. When things go well, we feel good for the moment – because the environment tells us everything is ok.

But when things don't go well, then we feel bad. It's the environment that causes us to feel bad or unhappy.

In either case, we become victims to our environment; not masters over it. That person, that problem, that circumstance, that issue is making me feel this way. Our focus gets gobbled up by petty and trivial matters which take precedence, thereby stunting our individual and organizational growth.

**When we learn to focus our attention and energy AND connect our time and actions to what matters most, the possibilities for what we can accomplish are infinite and purposeful.**

**Creativity, resiliency, communication, motivation, engagement, results, and leadership all thrive.**

We can change how we focus our attention and energy and when we do, we realize that we can deliberately shape our future. It is a future that needs our attention. Let's create it deliberately, and let's create it together.

# Are you listening to music?

Studies show that listening to music can help increase focus - especially when you're doing repetitive tasks that can cause your mind to wander.

Just stick to something you know - as new lyrics can distract you when your brain tries to memorize them.





# Lions Lurking in the Workplace

Anne McGhee-Stinson, Managing Partner

In a recent Harvard Business Review article entitled “Learning to live with Complexity,” the author states, “... [B]usiness today is fundamentally different than it was just 30 years ago. The most profound difference, we’ve come to believe, is the level of complexity people have to cope with.”

**This rising level of complexity is spawned by new technologies, a global landscape, and more collaborative work environments not to mention the complications added by a global pandemic.**

**Virtually everything about the way we work is changing, thus creating massive distractions in the workplace.**

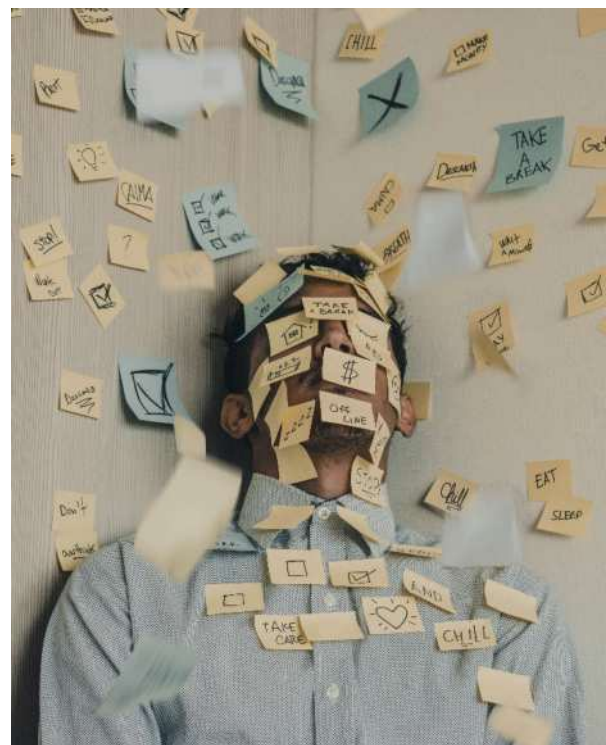
And while the complexity continues to increase, we haven’t reckoned with the impact it has on our capacity to focus. Neurologically, our central nervous system is hard-wired to pay attention to the most distracting element in the environment. This response system is what kept us safe as a species of hunter-gatherers, because the rustle in the bush may well have been a hungry lion.

Unlike today, our distant ancestors had the benefit of a period of recovery after surviving the lurking lion. They went back to the cave, ate, slept, and recovered in peace.

There was no 24-hour news coverage and none of the incessant demands of the modern workplace, including back-to-back meetings, hundreds of emails, projects, teams, travel schedules, etc.

External distractions are only part of the problem. In an overloaded society, the internal distractions caused by worry, too much input, financial challenges, relationships, and family pressures, take their toll. Human beings have a limited amount of attention and energy to spend at any given time. Yet we are so inundated with complexity, information, and data, our days are constantly filled with lurking lions causing our attention to be exhausted.

From a strictly personal vantage point, even before the pandemic, people were experiencing more stress, anxiety, isolation, and fear than ever.



Organizations must address these challenges with a new approach and train the skills most essential to success in complex, distraction-laden work environments.

**First, we must learn how to manage attention and energy at work, learn to reduce distractions, manage time and information input.**

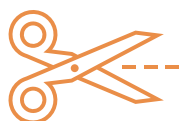
These are the critical skills that will help employees stay productive in an ever-changing work environment. Some simple adjustments include:



**Turn off all the bells, chimes, and notifications on your phone and computer. Instead, schedule focused time to process incoming information.**



**Schedule routine 1:1 meetings with team and staff to reduce ad hoc interruptions during the day.**



**When working from home, establish communication guidelines to set reasonable response time expectations and establish very clear boundaries to help separate work hours from home hours.**

Secondly, we must learn how to maintain focus on the priorities that matter most. Author Daniel Pink noted in his book “Drive” that an interesting change occurs in our brain when we commit to such a goal. He states, “Once we consciously focus on a goal, the brain subconsciously evaluates goal-relevant information in our environment that is consistent with achieving the goal. Like radar, it selectively notices incoming data that may contribute to or influence the goal. Concurrently, the brain inhibits irrelevant information to protect our delicate cognitive capacities from overload.”

- **Our ability to focus begins with intrinsically motivated goals. When we know what our priorities are and create an emotional attachment to them, we can focus more effectively.**
- **Rigorously manage your calendar to make certain you are spending your time on what matters most.**
- **Learn to say “no” or “not now” to less important priorities.**
- **Limit your priorities to no more than seven to ten at a time.**
- **Schedule routine meetings to address accountabilities on each priority.**

Given the complex, information-laden environments in which we find ourselves, we must change our approach. We must integrate what we now know about how the human brain works with simple yet practical methods that enable individuals and organizations to evolve new paradigms of communication, interaction, and work.

Limit distractions and focus on what matters most. It’s a simple solution to a complex problem, and it works.

# Risk or

**“Where you place your attention is where you place your energy.”**

It is a great little quip, and we use it frequently in our work. But what if this saying is more than that? What if this saying reflects a fundamental law of nature? What if everything in your current experience is an accurate reflection of how and where you are focusing?

If you are like many of us, you may find yourself focused on the challenges that you are facing whether they be personal or professional. After all, our brains are designed to help us identify threats and risks in our environment so that we can avoid them. We are far more likely to focus on risk rather than reward because this is the neurological mechanism that kept us safe from harm as a species, and it worked well - perhaps too well.

In our modern culture, our attention is incessantly bombarded with perceived “threats” and “risks” that activate our survival responses. The operative word here is “perceived.” Notice for just a moment how often television, movies, advertising, news, social media, friends, family, neighbors, board meetings, project meetings, performance reviews, co-workers or even your brain tends to focus on “what’s wrong, what’s not working, what could go wrong.”

## Grab a piece of paper and a pen and try this short activity to assess where you are currently focusing.

**Step 1:** Make a list of the most significant challenges you are currently facing.

**Step 2:** Review the diagram (to the right) and answer candidly for your benefit these questions:

- Where is your focus related to the challenges you listed above?
- Does your focus tend to fall on the right-hand side or the left-hand side of this diagram?



# Reward!



When we perceive our challenges as threats, it can lead to anxiety because we feel we are being forced to go beyond our limits or capacity to cope.

We also are likely to experience negative emotions like anxiety or frustration. Thoughts like “I can’t do that” go through our minds, causing us to feel stuck in the current situation without an apparent solution.

Consider the saying introduced earlier: “Where you place your attention is where you place your energy.” Is it possible that when we maintain our focus on the risks, the threats, our fears, our worries, or concerns that we are energizing them?

On the other hand, when we experience challenges as opportunities, for example, as an opportunity to grow or learn or do something new, this is when we are more likely to experience positive emotions such as excitement and enjoyment as an intrinsic sense of motivation.

Again, consider the saying introduced earlier: “Where you place your attention is where you place your energy.” Is it also possible that when we maintain our focus on the opportunities, the rewards, our courage, our imagination, or our future that we are energizing them?

Here is the bottom line: **Whether you perceive significant challenges in your life as threats or as opportunities greatly alters your entire experience of life. You always have a choice of where you focus your attention ~ so you might as well focus on what you want and what matters most to you!**



# Spring Clean with your EDGE System

Sarah Furrier, Relationship Lead + Facilitator

What we focus on expands, and perhaps that is why as a facilitator and user of the Effective EDGE® system, I “see” the system and its vast applications everywhere, including in my home. With the additional time spent at home during the pandemic, like many of us, I dedicated more time to organizing and experienced an uptick in streaming including shows like “Get Organized with The Home Edit.” These shows take principles like those in the Effective EDGE system and applies them to pantries, closets, and garage spaces to beautify them while increasing the form and function of the space.

Noticing the parallels of these suggestions led me to a few ahas in my Spring Cleaning:

## Use the 4D’s (Delete, Drag, Do It, Defer) at home.

The 4D’s provide a framework to help you focus on decision making and defeat “analysis paralysis.” Each step has ample opportunities for practice at home and can help combat overwhelm. Let’s explore:

### Delete

We may not have actual Delete buttons at home, but the principle of getting rid of things that we do not need still applies. Letting things go is important and frees up our energy and focus. In the show “Get Organized with The Home Edit,” this is called the “Edit” step. Marie Kondo, in her celebrated book, *The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, would have asked, “Does this item spark joy?” Deleting could look like donating items, throwing them away or even selling them. What can you “delete” at home to free up more physical (and mental) space?

### Drag

In the context of processing e-mail, we drag e-mails into Reference folders that do not require action or access to in the future. These e-mails are essentially “in storage” for that day we may need to retrieve them. At home, this means storing items that you may need in the future, but do not have use for right now. Perhaps in Spring Cleaning season this is boxing up your winter clothes until next season, packing up outgrown baby clothes that you would like to save, or perhaps it’s time to finally file all that miscellaneous paperwork that you need to hold onto. What might you “drag” into storage at home?

### Do

There are many opportunities to act on things at home that you can do in two-minutes or less. I think of this rule every time I consider tossing a shirt on a nearby chair (where it will inevitably remain for a week, while the pile grows larger and larger) as opposed to just taking 20 seconds to put the shirt on a hanger. The same thing applies to processing your physical mail, putting dishes in the dishwasher rather than leaving them in the sink, returning an item to its place rather than leaving it out, and so on. This is a prime example of “Small things done consistently in strategic places create major impact.” What could you start “doing” in two-minutes or less at home to prevent pile-up?

## Defer

For things that require action and are not fast or on fire, we add to our lists to do later. In the season of Spring Cleaning, this may look like dusting the fan blades, scrubbing baseboards, washing windows inside and out, and more. Deferring can also look like delegating tasks to family members and/or roommates at a future date. What can you “Defer” at home for later?

### Spring Clean Your Brain!

When was the last time you did a Mind Sweep? This is a simple daily practice we recommend to capture and release all your “mental clutter” allowing you to better focus, connect, clarify, prioritize, and more. If it has been a while, it’s probably time to eliminate those mental cobwebs by getting all your to-do’s out of your head whether they are personal or professional—consider it a “deep clean.” Feel free to do this on a piece of paper, in the memo-pad of your phone, or even in your Effective Edge Task List. We recommend that you give this practice all the time that it needs, especially if it has been a while. How do you anticipate feeling after freeing your brain from the clutter?

### Spring Clean Your Task List!

We already know we will never get it all done, so what items on your Task List can you eliminate? What is a “nice to do” rather than a “need to do?” What can move to the Someday/Maybe category, or perhaps be delegated to another person? If you’ve been looking at the same item for weeks and have not yet decided, why not? What is getting in the way? Is there a lack of clarity on your next step, or is it not important? Take time to check in with your Task List and ensure that it reflects your current reality. Going forward, make a goal of doing this on a weekly basis as part of your Weekly Recharge. How much do you think you can “clean up” off your list?

For continued support, please be sure to sign up for free Mastery webinars and Effective Edge Recharge webinars on our Learning eXperience Platform.



Join us!

 intera**works**

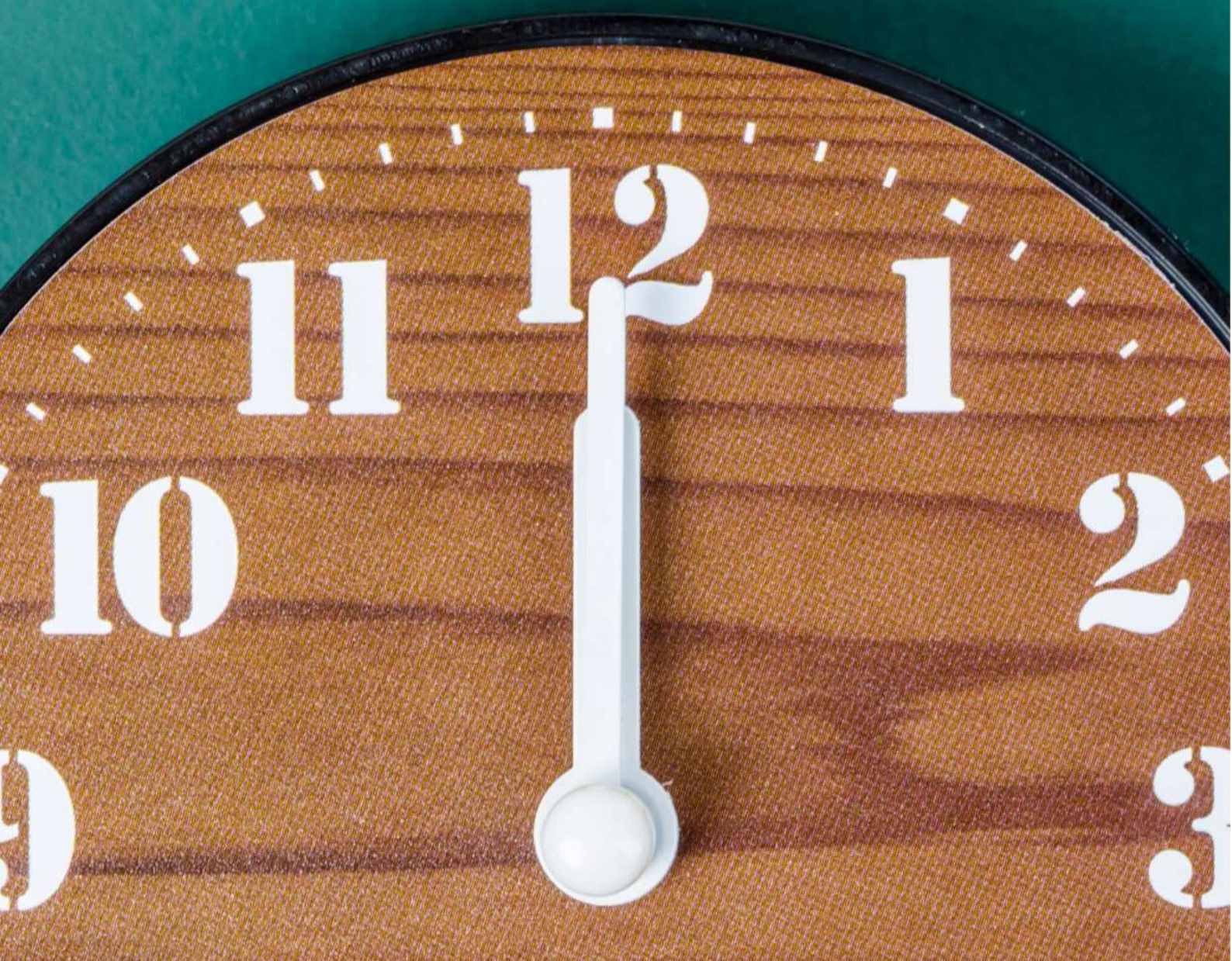
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# What We Allow, We Create

Julio Arquimbau, Facilitator



There are a couple of things I have noticed recently, even more so with my delegates, and that is the tendency to focus on either or both of the following:

- Tasks with the shortest deadlines
- The most recent task to arrive, be it an email, a message, or an interruption through one of their channels.

Both situations, in most cases, pay scant regard to what is important and everything to the allure of urgency. You know how the saying goes, “You get more of what you focus on.”

This then leads to a perpetual cycle that gets bigger and bigger and leaves little room, if any, for what is important.

I had the privilege recently of working with a colleague, Michelle Santaferraro, who in a discussion with a delegate said, “...what we allow we create...”

Now, I have heard this phrase before, but it had not stuck with me – yet on this occasion, it resonated. It is so true. When we let things happen and allow these things into our lives, we create this condition that causes so much stress and overwhelms us and a feeling of sometimes being out of control.

For example, feeling compelled to check or answer emails immediately, even though this may not be necessary. When we let things happen and allow these things into our lives, we create a condition that causes so much stress we become overwhelmed with the sense of being out of control.

Fresh with this insight ringing in my ears, I started to think more about how I can take control over and focus more on what is important.

One of the principles that underpins our teachings at InteraWorks is Gold Time Management.

This principle places a bit more focus on control and will help create a much better working condition; one where you feel more fulfilled, you are working on what you should be working on, and you are delivering what you need to deliver.

So, let us look deeper at what we mean by Gold Time Management and then look at ways to help us be more intentional about what we spend our time on.

Many of us have seen this time management model or something similar. The reality is that investing in gold time gives you a 10-fold return on your outlay. As an ex-banker that makes this a very sound investment indeed.

I want to start by being crystal clear about what constitutes gold time activities, and to do this we need to define what we mean by ‘Important’ and ‘Urgent’.

**Important** – is critical to success in your role. This does not only apply to work but in any role in your life – parent, partner, or community leader amongst many others.

**Urgent** – demands your immediate attention. Usually, because there is an unpleasant consequence if you do not. This could be a complaint, a break in a process or a legislative breach and so many more.

## Gold Time Management

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crises and emergencies</li> <li>• Pressing problems</li> <li>• Deadline-driven projects</li> <li>• Important meetings</li> <li>• Regular reporting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategy</li> <li>• Building relationships</li> <li>• Exploring new possibilities</li> <li>• Personal development</li> <li>• Progressing projects proactively</li> </ul>
Not Important	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interruptions</li> <li>• Reading reports</li> <li>• Many meetings</li> <li>• Most phone calls</li> <li>• The latest Emails</li> <li>• Other people's agendas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trivia, “busy work”</li> <li>• Sorting papers</li> <li>• Wasting time</li> <li>• Filing</li> <li>• Idle chatter</li> <li>• Most Email</li> </ul>

With these two definitions clear in your mind,

**‘Gold Time’ is all about those activities that are critical to your success but that are not necessarily time-bound.**

However, the caveat here is that if you never find the time to do them, then the consequences will come back to haunt you and could be very damaging to you personally and or professionally.

So let me try and illustrate this. Relationship building or networking is a gold-time activity. You do not have to do it right this minute or even tomorrow, but if you keep putting it off, then you become more detached from people, you lose contact, they do not know you, you don't know them. You miss out on potential opportunities in the future.

So, my first piece of advice is to take back control of your time. It is your time, and you need to be a zealot and guard it. Why? Because if you do not, somebody else will come along and steal it – take it from you and replace it with something that is usually important to them but not to you. If you allow people to steal your time, then this is something you have created – you have permitted to allow this other person to have free reign with your time. Is this what you want?

Let me illustrate time zealotness concerning a meeting invitation you accept. There is no agenda. You are not clear what the meeting is about. You accept because it must be felt by others that you need to be there. Attending this meeting means you will not be able to complete the next stage of your project which you had planned to do, but not to worry, you will find some time either later or tomorrow you hope. You have put the needs of others in front of yours without being clear that these needs are more important than yours. Is that the state you want to create?

Looking at everything you have on your plate through the lens of ‘importance’ and ‘urgency’ will help you see how you are using your time. This exercise can be truly eye-opening and enlightening. Many a time I have delegates comment that just stepping back for a few moments and looking at how they allocate their time teaches them so much. You cannot always see this when you are stuck in the work.

Einstein once famously said, “You can’t solve problems with the same thinking that got you there.”

**You need to create space to allow this alternative thinking and gold time is critical for this.**

My second piece of advice would be to block out time in your calendar for these gold-time activities. Research shows that scheduling when and where you will do something makes it dramatically more likely that the task will get done. These are appointments with yourself to do what matters most to you will be far more beneficial, valuable, and less frustrating than most meetings you attend! But do not get me started on meetings as this, I am sure, will be the topic of another blog!

Carve out chunks of time. Some people prefer large chunks; others prefer smaller more regular chunks. Mix it up maybe, react to whatever you have on your plate which then makes it feel more organic and intentional rather than prescribed – do whatever works for you, but do it.

One of the best practices we advocate and teach is a Weekly recharge where you set time aside each week to review the past week and plan the forthcoming week. This is extremely powerful and will be the most valuable 90 minutes you spend at work. And what are 90 minutes in the context of the number of hours you work per week? It is much less than 0.03% of your time which is a tiny price to pay for the unquestionable return – again, another sound investment decision in my mind.

My third piece of advice is to get better at saying “no”. To do this you need to practice it more because many of us find this hard.

One of the biggest ways we waste our time on unimportant tasks is the inability to say “no.” It is okay to say “no.” It is okay to say you cannot do something. It is okay to have boundaries. If you do not set boundaries, anything goes.

Saying “yes” to one task is saying “no” to another. When you say “yes” to an unimportant task, you are saying “no” to one of your more important tasks. Is this the condition you want to create?

I have found it easier, and you may also, to say “no” to the task and not the person.

So, when asked to do something that is not important to you, ask yourself:

- “Do I have the time to do it?” – remember will it stop you from doing something that is important to you?
- “Am I the right person?” – how does this fit with my goals and objectives?
- “Is there someone else better suited?” – or am I asked because I always say yes and then stress to get my own work done?

How then do you communicate this? Here are some examples:

- “I’m sorry, I can’t do that analysis this week. I can do it for you next Tuesday after month-end is complete.”
- “I’m sorry, I can’t take on doing this analysis regularly because my boss wants me to focus on and prioritize development work. But I know my colleague is working on developing his Excel skills. Would you like me to show him how to extract the data so he can take this on?”
- “I could run that report, but I wonder what information you want from it. If it is the attrition rate you are after, would one of the measures in the monthly HR Excellence Report we publish give you what you need?”

I’m sure that demoting your gold time is not a state you want to create and yet we so easily do this and then wonder why we don’t achieve what we want to achieve. Remember to follow these tips:

- Take back control of your time – it’s your time and you have the ultimate say on where and when to use it.
- Physically block out time in your calendar for gold time activities – these will be the most productive times of your day.
- Get better at saying “no” – but remember it is the task you are saying no to, not the person.

Allowing yourself to undertake these actions will create a gold-edged return on your investment.

“You can’t solve problems with the same thinking that got you there.”



## 15 Ways to Say

Stephenie Rockwell, Director of Operations + Relationship Lead

I know a guy.

This guy says “YES!” to every request.

It can be a giant six-month project or a simple two-minute request – and he is your guy. He is a great team player, great performer, and he is very well-liked at his organization.

But he is burned out. He is overcommitted and underwater on deliverables and his lack of follow-through is beginning to damage his professional and personal relationships. We recently had a conversation about this very topic, and he said, “I say yes because it’s a quick win in the moment, I genuinely want to do the work, and I sometimes feel I am the only one with access to the information or skills they need.”

We discussed the cost of always saying yes and he said, “My list always seems overwhelming, I routinely miss deadlines, people never learn to do for themselves, so they are super dependent, and I rarely get to work on my own goals. It’s not scalable and as more people join the company, I become the bottleneck.”

Learning how to say “no” in a professional manner is sometimes a necessary part of being productive. Adding too much to your plate just to please others can lead to overwhelm or missed deadlines. Missed deadlines can often end up damaging relationships which are often what people who always say yes are trying to avoid!

No one wants to come across poorly or be viewed in a negative light for declining requests. And for this guy, he had a hard time coming up with a professional way to even say, “no” or “not now.” He searched for tips on the internet but found few helpful examples he could use.

Research from a wide variety of resources revealed saying “no” is a common challenge for many people, yet there is a plethora of useful information to aid the habitual “Yes” responders. Below are 15 examples of how to say “no” or “not now” professionally and effectively. Please keep in mind your audience and be as polite and respectful as possible when replying.

- 1. I do not have the bandwidth available to get this done within that time frame (or by that deadline). If you would like to bring this up with (Name) or schedule a call, we can see what other priorities can shift to make this happen.**
- 2. The timing right now is not good, I am underwater working on (Project Name). If you need things like this in the future, I need about (time frame) notice to help me manage my other expectations.**
- 3. Thank you for this email, but I am unable to complete this item for you. I have made several videos on SharePoint around this topic, which you can reference here (link). I’d also check in with (Name), they may be able to help train someone on your staff on how to handle these requests.**

4. (Name) booked up my time completely this week to solely focus on (Project/Area). I can look at completing this in a few weeks if that helps.
5. I am happy to help with this, but I will not be able to deliver this for a few weeks. I have upcoming deadlines with my projects.
6. Thanks for reaching out. I can send you this file, but I am unable to make it into these slides. Is there another way I can help?
7. Unfortunately, this request is out of my wheelhouse. Sorry for the inconvenience, but I am not even sure where to direct you. I could help with (one aspect), but I do not have the data or skills to help with (other aspects) by the time you need.
8. I am booked solid working on a project for (Name), sorry that I cannot be more helpful.
9. I do not have the bandwidth to complete this by the time you need it. Can you reach out to (Name) if it is truly urgent, and they can help shift my other priorities so I can make this work for you?
10. This is a large ask with a tight turnaround. I have got some major items I need to get out for my team. I have concerns that I would end up missing the deadline.
11. Let me think about this and get back to you, I need to run this by (Name) to see if it aligns with where she has asked me to focus.
12. The idea sounds great! It is just that...
13. I cannot today. How about by next week?
14. I would be unable to do a good job with this request and my other work would suffer.
15. Thank you so much for thinking of me for this, but I was planning to spend the next few weeks working on (Project X, Project Y, Deliverable Z). Can you tell me of these three projects, which are the priorities for you, and I can make that switch?

And a bonus example for when you already said yes, but you need to renegotiate:

16. I know that I offered to take on this (number) weeks ago, but things have changed since then, and I feel I may not have the time to give this my 100%. I do not want to leave you hanging, so I can recommend a few people who have the skills to handle this, or I can provide this by the end of next month. If you want to talk this through, let me know.

I hope you find something useful from this list that empowers you to change your view that saying “no” is selfish. It is being smart with your time, understanding your priorities, and connecting them to what matters most.

I know a guy who agrees.



best year yet foundation™

# STORIES OF IMPACT

“Our partnership with the Best Year Yet Foundation was a revelation!”

- Monika Bajka, Director and President of the Board  
of the Anioly House of Guardian Angels in Poland



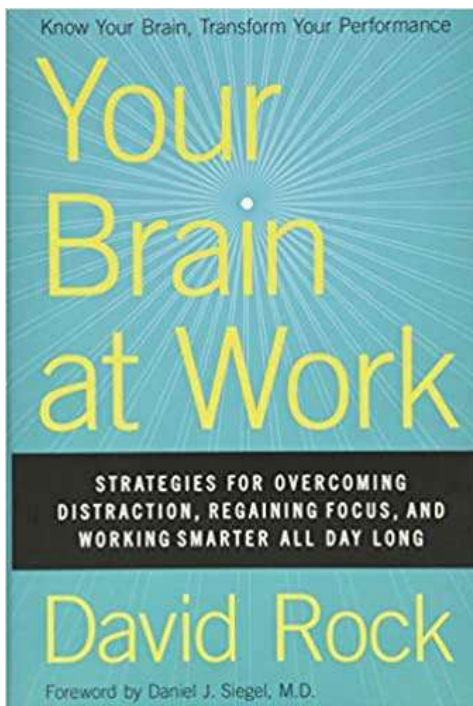
[CLICK HERE](#) to read the incredible story of Anioly and other Best Year Year Foundation partnerships!

# take it one step further

## Recommended Reading

### Your Brain at Work

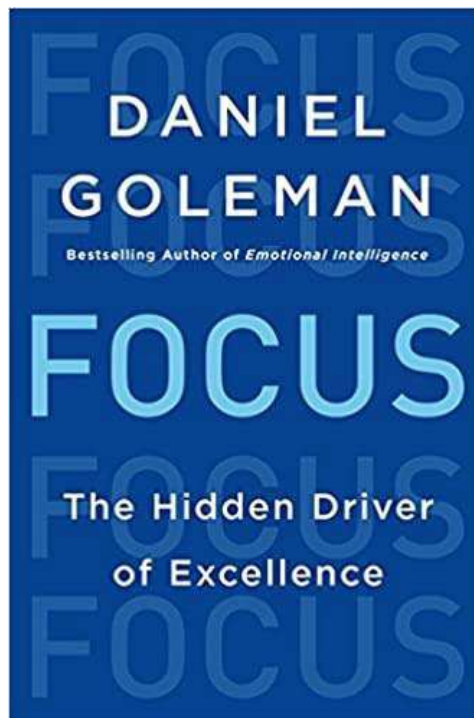
By David Rock



In *Your Brain at Work*, Dr. Rock explores issues such as why our brains feel so taxed, how to maximize our mental resources, why it's so hard to focus, and how to better manage distractions, how to collaborate more effectively with others

### Focus

By Daniel Goleman



Combining cutting-edge research with practical findings, *Focus* delves into the science of attention in all its varieties, presenting a long overdue discussion of this little-noticed and under-rated mental asset. In an era of unstoppable distractions, Goleman persuasively argues that now more than ever we must learn to sharpen focus if we are to survive in a complex world.

# Insights from the InteraWorks Team!

## When are you most focused?

*"My most focused time of the day is literally the first 2-hours of my day. What I have found is by taking these two most important hours to tackle my most important to-dos energizes me for the rest of the day. Prior to me implementing this strategy I would let the day progress with me filling in all the "2-minute" drills and neglecting often my most important tasks. I encourage you to tackle the big stuff early and you will have more than enough (Time & Energy) as your day progresses."*

Thomas Ramsey  
Relationship Lead + Facilitator

*"I'm most focused in the mornings, though I can sometimes get lost in projects any time of the day that I'm well-rested and have blocks of uninterrupted time. Best Year Yet has helped a lot with blocking out "Gold Time" on my calendar to make sure I can focus and get things done."*

Cathey Stamps  
Marketing + Partner Lead

*"In the morning for sure. I take the dogs in the backyard, enjoy the sunrise, then come in to feed them. I make coffee, read the paper and eat a good breakfast. Now I'm ready for InteraWorks. Upon logging into my laptop, I quickly scan emails in case there is a lurker. My dashboard and calendar let me know what the day looks like. I don't know that I'm less focused in the afternoon, but I do enjoy the morning routine. If there is a long afternoon ahead, I may take a yoga class at lunch or go for a walk to get re-energized."*

Kim Brewster  
Executive Administrator

# What is your greatest distraction?

*"A consistent and lifelong distraction is a messy workspace or environment. If the space is a mess, my mind is fragmented and it's agitating. Clearing the space is for me like our mind sweep exercise in Effective Edge. Order and space allow me to focus and to be creative and strategic. If the desktop or space bothers me, my best tactic is to simply fix it in the moment. Carving out space away from less orderly family members is also helpful. Taking time ahead of time to set the stage is always high value."*

Laurie Oswald  
Chief Executive Officer

*"It's a tie between my mind and my phone. My phone gets put away on my nightstand about 8pm every night so I'm not even tempted to mindlessly scroll. For my mind, I keep it empty by mind sweeping almost every day. Keeping my mind empty is the most effective way I've found to keep me present."*

Jennifer Bried  
Facilitator

*"My greatest distraction is everything I see around my home that needs to get done. Like many of us, I've found it's easy to suddenly start tidying up, paying bills, scheduling appointments, the list goes on and on. I've combatted this by scheduling 1-hour per week to knock out all the measly little personal items that hook your attention throughout the week. It has created freedom, focus, and relief for me."*

Sarah Furrier  
Relationship Lead + Facilitator

# How do you maintain focus?

*"Beginning my day with intention is the best and most successful methodology that I use. I have a recurring calendar appointment at the beginning of my day, and I review my calendar, my tasks and commitments, my family calendar, etc. I categorize last night's mind sweep tasks and then do another mind sweep. Then I set my top priorities for the day (including self-care). I then work on 2 min or less tasks, renegotiations (if needed), and onto the 1st priority."*

Stephenie Rockwell  
Director of Operations + Relationship Lead

*"I am so easily distracted I HAVE TO live by my calendar. My calendar shows what I committed to doing - so maybe I do have time to allow the creative experience that distraction can provide me or guide me back to what is more important for me to focus on. I have come to love the freedom in the structure of a calendar!"*

Jennifer Wilmoth  
Relationship Lead + Facilitator

*"To keep my focus minute to minute: I rigidly stick to one thing at a time (whatever it is) and use timers to let me know when my "allotted" time for that activity is up. It took a bit of practice, but now I can stay on track and focus on that one thing no matter what pops up, i.e., phone, email, text, live interruptions or even thoughts. I have a polite and respectful preplanned statement for anyone that needs me in the moment (this is context/environment driven but thought out prior to beginning my "activity." This all may seem a bit complicated; however, it is what works for me, and I recommend to anyone to find a methodology that is similar and ...stick to it...with minor adjustments...for at least 66 days!"*

Frank Leitzman  
Facilitator

*"Focus and simplicity...  
once you get there, you can move mountains."  
—Steve Jobs*



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