Driven To Distraction
At Work: How To Focus & Be More Productive by Edward M. Hallowell, MD
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ADT or Attention Deficit Trait is a term coined by focus doctor Edward Hallowell (author of this book), who observed a problem many people confused with ADHD or ADD, actual attention disorders. ADT, unlike its relatives, has no genetic base whatsoever. It is a result of modern life, making it a circumstantial issue. You may have it on weekdays but not on weekends; you may have it at work but not at home.

Because ADT helps in the short term solution to modern problems, it can solidify into habits, flooding life even when it's meant to be taken at a slower pace. Attention-snatching temptations of modern life get into our head and make so much noise that concentrating on anything becomes difficult.

The onset of ADT is gradual and pervasive. The average sufferer starts having issues with memory, finds the workday longer and harder to keep up with. He then “sucks it up” and keeps on doing his job, not noticing how his work life is changing dramatically.

It works similarly to the boiled frog anecdote. If you throw a frog in a pot of boiling water, it’ll quickly jump out of it. If you put it in cold water and gradually rise the temperature, however, you end up with a boiled frog.

Symptoms of ADT include
Distractibility, shallowness of thought and feeling, inability to concentrate, impulsive decision-making, avoidance, irritability, loss of interest or pleasure in activities, feeling overwhelmed even when you are not, overcommitting, compulsive need of electronic "hits", and the recurring idea that someday you'll make time for what matters, just not now.

The cost of ADT
There is a huge cost associated with our disintegrated attention which translates in profit for organizations and mental health for individuals. The cost in profit is estimated to be around US$ 282 – 997 billion dollars annually, depending on who you ask.

Multitasking, a branch of ADT, is proven to lessen quality of work.

And of course we are not speaking of only productivity. A surgeon describes that his Operating Room (OR) seems a prone environment for doctors to suffer from Acute ADT, due to the multiple distractions involved: phone, pager, nurses, anesthesia, schedule pressure, etc. This can be very problematic to the surgeon’s decision making process, which is especially critical if anything in the operating room goes wrong.

The diagnosis
The modern danger consists of acting solely on the pressure of whatever is worrying us at the moment, while losing sight of our most precious life projects.

The people who suffer ADT don’t tend to think focus is exactly their problem, or even the system or their boss. They usually blame themselves for “not doing enough” and that’s part of the issue. If you have an eyesight problem, squinting harder isn’t going to solve it. The solution isn’t to try harder, but to work smarter.

We will look at six common varieties of ADT, describe them with their everyday pressures of modern life, and provide practical solutions. These are: Screen Sucking, Multitasking, Idea Hopping, Worrying, Playing the Hero, Dropping the Ball. Each of these syndromes can have a relation to earlier developmental experience: those who Play Hero can start as a child trying to protect their family from a
tyrannical father; whilst a Screen Sucking individual can have his habit worsen due to an earlier sense of helplessness from his school years.

**Attention training and management - The Basic Plan**

**Energy:** People tend to treat themselves as if they had an infinite supply of energy when, actually, it’s a valuable and scarce resource. When you begin to treat it as such, spending energy wisely on what you determine it’s important, and still observing your tank is full, you’ll respond positively.

**Emotions:** Undervalued by some, emotions play a key role in our focus. If you work in a group that is based on fear, you tend to underperform; whilst if you work in a trust-based group, you achieve best results. Positive emotion equals engagement, which equals quality work.

**Engagement:** A result of working on what you love, what you excel at doing, and what advances a group mission or you are paid to do. An additional element is an appropriate room for creativity.

**Structure:** How you spend your time, think, and plan out strategies is your structure; along with what systems you use and your particular methods of going about your work. To create a proper structure you need to take control.

**Control:** No one would flush $150 dollars down the drain on purpose, and yet many of us tend to waste at least 150 minutes every day in purposeless attention-eating activities. If you don’t take your time seriously, then it will be taken from you.

An adequate work plan on each of these six areas will provide you what you need to focus on what you do and on doing it as best as possible. An evaluation can be found at www.hbr.org/assessments/adt.

**SCREEN SUCKING**

**The problem**
The increasing compulsion to be online, with a loss of focus in everything else. This is the fastest growing type of ADT today. Some have also addressed it as Computer Addiction, Internet Addiction, Internet Use Disorder and Internet Gaming Disorder (DSM 5).

Those who have the Screen Sucking variant of ADT agree with these statements:
- I need my cellphone next to me
- There is more I need to do than time I have to do it
- I can’t go to lunch without my phone
- I can browse for an hour with no real awareness of what I’m doing
- I have the will; just not the way
- I’m an underachiever at my job
- Whenever I can, I will go online
- I lack discipline

Some examples of digital addiction include: Losing a job or relationship because you "never get your eyes off the screen", jeopardizing real relationships for emotionally shallow cyber exchanges or affairs, sucked in to video games and underperforming at school, etc.
Other characteristics include: inability to stay away from electronics, screen staring, inability to be mentally present, loss of creativity or reflective thinking, and a compulsion to always be online with irritability if unable to.

Screen addiction is also problematic because unlike other addictions: gambling, drugs, and sex; the behavior is not that notorious. You can be addicted to the mere sensation of online activity, and that's not so easy to notice.

Some of the DSM 5 criteria include symptoms of tolerance and withdrawal, a recurrent preoccupation with internet gaming (IG), loss of interest in other activities, jeopardizing relationships due to the gaming, unsuccessful tries to control his gaming, deceiving friends in regards to IG, continued IG even in awareness of negative consequence, and use of IG to escape negative feelings.

The problem may best be described as Problematic Use of Electronic Devices (PUED), a broader term referring to any use of these devices that causes a serious behavioral problem. It can be categorized on five levels depending on severity:

- **Conflictvic**: Usage is perceived as annoying to at least one person.
- **Mild**: Usage perceived as annoying to others and does not stop when urged by others.
- **Moderate**: Usage is annoying and causing problems in one or more areas of life.
- **Severe**: Usage is annoying, causing problems in one or more areas of life, and the user feels unable to control the problem.
- **Addictive**: All of the above plus at least 2 of these symptoms: salience, mood-modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, relapse.

**Solutions**

Although the symptoms associate with technology, screen suckers fall into virtual life instead of tackling their real one, is due to feelings of powerlessness and a lack of confidence in their own capacities, as happens in all addictions. These need to be addressed.

Twelve-step programs such as the ones in AA, replace the craving and dysfunctional attitudes towards substance with human connections and this is a good model for any addiction.

The Lance Dodes psychological model states that it is not the substance or object of addiction that initially gives the addict pleasure, but rather pleasure comes from making the decision to use. This replaces the addicts underlying sense of helplessness with a sense of some self-control, even before the addictive action or substance is applied.

Furthermore every addictive act is a substitute for a more direct behavior. The driving force behind addiction is not the feeling of helplessness alone, but a rage directed at it. Rather than express his genuine emotion the addict avoids it and escapes into his addiction.

Social relationships can help in both providing support and helping the person with ADT monitor himself. Referring to support groups is also recommended, as well as replacing the addictive behavior with creative and engaging activities.

Again it is useful to review the elements associated with addiction that are to be addressed: a slow drain of energy from the addiction, a kind of emotional numbness, a lack or reduced engagement in the rest of life, a dysfunctional structure or set up, and a loss of control over one's life.

**Other helpful steps:**
Create a record of how much time you spend on electronic devices. Afterwards, honestly look at where you could cut back. Reclaim some of the time you had surrendered.

Create scheduled times for use of technology. 30 minutes early in the day, or in the afternoon, to do what you need to do. Other times, turn them off.

Turn off the devices at social encounters.

When you get bored don't resort to electronic devices. Go back to something you've been meaning to do, or do something more productive. Make a list of things you can do and use it.

Make reflective use of face to face, human encounters. They are more powerful than cyber ones.

Observe your progress. This'll motivate you to continue and provide you an incentive to do better work.

**MULTITASKING**

**The problem**
Those who fit this category of ADT share these traits: the idea multitasking is necessary to get things done, have a hard time saying no, are easily interrupted at work, believe that they just need to "get organized", often wish they had some time without interruptions.

They live life in a sort of hyper-speed: overcommitted, overworked, never having time to relax. Their lives are a response to a series of other people's requests that they feel unable to turn down. Lest they be thought as not valuable or useful.

Multitaskers are unable to sit down and pay full attention to their friends or family. They feel themselves responsible for everything and everyone. It's also hard for them to take on any task slowly and reflectively, which wastes a lot of potential.

Proud of these traits they will busy themselves up with cleaning the house, following up on something, always being busy; even when there is no pressing need for that particular task.

They tend to have a distorted sense of time in which they imagine they can do 30 minutes of work within 5 minutes; leading them to sometimes compromise, fall short, and feel as if they failed.

When anything required patience: whether it be a friendly conversation, a grocery line or traffic, multitaskers will often try to hurry things up, and if unsuccessful may leave frustrated or even rudely towards others.

Gradually the sense of hurry takes over and they begin replacing working smart with working hard, even if ineffectively. They stop nurturing activities and take on life as a mechanical routine that can never be slowed down, in which they are but a tool to serve tasks at hand.

Having so much to do a tipping-point is usually reached when multitaskers, clumped up with frustrations from months, if not years old; take it out on a loved one. These can lead the only sources of social support to withdraw, which will increase anxiety and "tasks to do", leading down a dangerous rabbit hole.

Loss of physical activity and quality sleep tend to accompany this, due to all of the worrying. Modern life taking its toll, the multitasker is too busy with tasks to be busy with life, and so has lost significant quality in several areas including mood, relationships, physical well-being, work, etc.
Feelings of negativity, anxiety, and cluttered worries lead to a global sense of frustration; which leads to escaping into behaviors that do nothing to nurture the person, which in turn leads to an attitude of rejection towards others and life.

The personality roots of Multitaskers
Multitasker-type ADTs may have had a childhood in which they were neglected by their parents or expected to perform a certain way, leading them to believe an excessive performance is requirement for personal value.

They may also have had to be independent early on, taking care of their own meals, getting themselves ready for school, caring for their siblings, etc. They learn that that's the way life is supposed to be. That being good means taking care of yourself, accommodating to everyone else, and may see pleasure time as bad, even sinful; like breaking a sacred code.

There are benefits to being a multitasker-type of person, such as higher senses of responsibility, empathy, ambition, and a desire of making a contribution. But there are also problems, like: making themselves responsible for what they are not, inability to appreciate life's beauty, inability to pay attention to their own needs, and a feeling of never doing enough.

Solutions
Multitaskers are usually very resilient. If they can acknowledge that they have a problem, they could recover sooner rather than later. It is the ones who refuse to seek help that end up losing the most. In strong cases the basic plan may need to be adjusted to simply freeing up some personal time to sleep, eat and exercise, as well as creating more self-coherent structures that don't just focus on pleasing everyone else.

This can be difficult because saying no may represent a breach of sacred rules the ADT sufferer followed his or her entire life. But it is necessary. One way to do it is by providing encouragement, as well as role play to test out the new behaviors in a controlled form, then setting them as homework for life itself. As the client reports how and if it worked, this reinforces the behavior and allows higher levels of function.

Again anger plays a decisive role. Multitaskers may have a fundamental claim: to want a life of their own; beyond others’ expectations. Although it is a frustration, it is also a moving force.

As far as the basic plan, multitaskers: feel their energy ragged by the idea of being a good or perfect person, build up anger due to overspending or over demanding, over engage and so engage inefficiently, set up inefficient structures and boundaries, and yield control to their sense of duty.

Other helpful steps:
It’s not possible to focus on two tasks at once. If you are doing two relatively dull activities, you might get away with it, but if either of them are complex then your performance will be impaired.

A lot of information is lost when you multitask and chances of making mistakes increase exponentially.

Politely decline requests, practice if necessary.

Delegate. It is okay to pass on some tasks to other people, just as other people have passed tasks to you.
When an opportunity comes for something you are good at do say yes, this will create the engagement element for the basic plan. Also understand that when you say no, you do a favor to everyone, as you would have not been able to pay deserving attention to the task.

**IDEA HOPPING**

**The problem**
Coming up with a thousand projects but not being able to follow-through on a single one. Idea hoppers tend to have several ideas, often very good ones; but find themselves distracted by their next new idea rather than sticking to a single project.

Idea hoppers tend towards these ideas:

- I'm great with starts and endings; it's the middle I can't deal with.
- There's much more in my head than I can handle with my hands.
- I don't know how to prioritize.
- I stay awake running through new ideas.
- I can follow-up on a project while it's new, but afterwards it's no longer exciting.

They may feel a major excitement in going through their new ideas, growing them in their mind, thinking how each of them can turn up and be successful. But it's turning those ideas into reality that's the problem. They follow their dreams, they just can't catch them.

They also have issues delegating. They jump into projects and abruptly stop, as if others would magically turn up to sort out the rest of the details.

Idea hoppers tend to be entrepreneurs by nature; creative people with a kind of liveliness that is alluring to others. This talent is not always nourished, and during childhood parents may see it as a deviation from the norm rather than an individual gift.

This as well as neglect towards the child or a lack of proper parental presence may be common. So idea hoppers tend to develop an extraordinary self-sufficiency, they "stand on their own two feet" early on. This provides them with mental strength, but can make it difficult to recognize that they need someone else's help.

Search for independency, the ability to take on risks, of being a visionary and flowing through new ideas; these are some of the positive traits idea hoppers can have. On the downside they might be impulsive, lack long-term motivation, can easily get bored, have trouble following directions, and can be compulsive.

**The solution**
Knowing which positive traits of the above a particular person possesses can help them manage the negative ones. Traumatic experiences can also be an obstacle, and mental health professionals can follow three steps to work through them: acknowledgement, bearing, and putting into perspective the painful memories.

The patient then can grow emotionally and be able to tackle on problems more directly, having less need of hopping from idea to idea, and being able to purposefully stick to a single one, at least during a longer extent.
Then there is the more practical aspect of how to make a decision, which should be done alongside the more emotional part mentioned earlier. Here are some tips for that practical aspect:

Keep a notebook next to wherever you come up with good ideas. This could be anything like the shower, next to your bed, by the dinner table, etc.

Brainstorm with someone else who knows you very well, to help you decide.

Write down all of your possible ideas, rate them from one to ten, and then stick with the greatest number. Alternatively, write down the pros and cons of each; stick with what shows higher value.

Visuals can help. Use colors, flashing lights, make a list in big block letters, anything that signals your attention. Being playful will create engagement and can help you overcome any underlying fear by virtue of a higher engagement value. This will clear the mind and what you want is more likely to reveal itself.

Here's how Idea Hopping affects the 5 areas of the basic plan: energy is drained by thinking constantly of new ideas, emotion is also drained or negative due to a constant self-blaming, inability to engage consistently with a single idea, a structure is not able to be created on their own, their minds wander away autonomously, with no control whatsoever.

**Helpful tips**

For most people who ideas hop their main issue is structure, but it may be useful to review all 5 elements for evaluation.

Do not surrender. Idea hoppers can fear their own power, and give up on a goal out of fear that to win, they will hurt someone else. It actually doesn't work that way. If you win then others benefit as well. It's not a zero-sum game.

Those who think they can and those who think they can't are both correct. It's actually been researched that both of these mindsets work as a self-fulfilling prophecy, and also that any one person can develop the growth-type of mindset, which is great to know.

Partner up with the right people, perhaps those who are good at following other's ideas and not so much at inventing their own. Work together and complement your talents.

**WORRYING**

**The problem**

The tendency to worry about issues that aren't all that important as if they were. Worriers tend to agree to fall toward the following sentiments: I worry even when I don't need to, regardless of how much I do I feel it's never enough, I step back on life sometimes out of fear, success makes me anxious, I have trouble expressing complaints.

Some characteristics of worriers are:

- Cancelling or having too little free time.
- Poor sleep
- They may show several signs of anxiety, biting their nails for example.
- They are constantly working, even when they are not.
- May be socially inhibited or distracted.
• Can love work a bit too much, and love to talk about work and/or making money.
• They have trouble making time for friends and family.
• They can have the recurring, irrational idea that if they could just make more money, life will be sorted out.

Because of all the worrying they have a problem valuing life and family. They may have a predisposition towards constant preoccupation in their genes, and/or a certain family history that has taught them to not trust in other people. They learn that "life is never safe", and live by that motto.

Usually coming from families where rising up economically is very important, they can take on this preoccupation as a kind of overcompensation.

Having a hard time trusting, they prefer to retreat into their work and anxiety rather than discussing issues with a friend or partner. Work becomes an obsession that looms over every activity. If they aren't working, they feel off, like something is wrong.

The environment can have a positive impact as well: being away from toxic influences that promote the "never trust anyone" motto and around people who can be trusted and enjoyed with is one protective factor that can mitigate these worrying conditions.

Modern life also plays a role, as in today's environment the predispositions of worrying have plenty of room to flourish. Fear-based news spread like wildfire, and while we are technically more socially connected, we're also growing more emotionally apart.

While worrying can have its benefits: it can help solve problems, it can help you focus and be self-sufficient, keep sight of opportunities, etc., it also brings some downsides such as hyper-vigilante, a kind of emotional paranoia, isolation, inability to trust or even to have an enjoyable time.

The solution
Some good prescriptions for worry-o-holics are physical exercise, to try and balance serotonin, as well as human connection. Worrying is not necessarily bad, but worrying alone can be, which is why the connection part is important.

In addition, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, like Lexapro can help severe cases just to speed up the recovery process; only if necessary. Serotonin has a lot to do with emotional balance.

Here’s how chronic worrying affects the 5 elements of the basic plan: constant worrying drains your mental energy, while emotion is numbed down preventing optimal learning, performance, or engagement, submission to worry takes over structuring a good routine, and control is given to toxic worry over functional thought.

Helpful tips
Understand the facts - toxic worry preys lack of information

Make a plan. If it doesn’t work, don’t fret and revise it; pathological worry runs from someone with a plan.

Learn to exercise and meditate - they shield against worry.
Do not worry alone.

Engage yourself in activities that divert you, these immunize against worry.

Worry is caused by increased vulnerability and diminished sense of control - anything you can use to reverse those two will help.

**PLAYING THE HERO**

**The problem**
Those who play the hero have an impulse to reach out to others, to look out for them, but will often fail to look out for themselves. A condition more common in women, they may help others reach far heights while avoiding the spotlight themselves.

Those who play hero agree with these sentiments: they are constantly plagued with guilt; they take on other’s issues too readily, are often told they should be more selfish, and feel compelled to help others at work.

They may have grown up taking care of their family and carry on this role into adult life, even being a kind of motherly or fatherly figure to colleagues and friends.

Conventional psychology and economics tells us humans are wired towards self-interest, and this has only increased in modern times: celebrity culture and corporate greed can be some of those manifestations, as well as the political game. Narcissism is a spreading virus.

Yet, it seems some people are genetically wired to focus on other’s needs over their own. It seems that doing something for others will raise their dopamine level: it’s pleasurable. So it is both selfish and selfless act. They are giving, but they also receive.

Those who play the hero can act as "toxic handlers", mediating between a toxic person, and actual narcissist, and the rest of the world. They inhale some of the poison before it causes too much damage.

Without knowing they can cause too much pain for themselves and those close to them. This branch of ADT shares traits with codependency and Stockholm syndrome, as well as what Anna Freud called “identification with the aggressor” where we defend from threats by affiliating to the very thing that threatens us.

They can use and learn a vast range of skills just to keep a narcissist at bay, to handle that toxicity. These skills and efforts often go unnoticed, lifesaving as they can be. But these skills can come at the expense of one’s own well-being, feelings of burning out, depression and even loss of physical health.

Being someone who plays the hero, or a toxic handler, also has its ups and downs. They are sensitive and eager to assist in resolving conflict; they can reframe situations and defuse others, bring growth and cohesion to organizations and are easily trusted. At the same time, it’s easily that they can get hurt emotionally, can have trouble handling praise or any other reward, accepting help and may have issues being direct.

**The solution**
One of the biggest issues they can have is suppression of their own anger, a learned survival reflex, but one which can have a deadly cost in later life.
To work this through a safe therapeutic relationship has to be built, a safe environment to touch on said anger, and that takes time. During that time it’s important to provide counsel on how to take care of their own selves, while still being good towards others; but accepting that they are responsible for their own life, as we all are.

Another important thing is, as mentioned before, to not worry alone. Overcoming these types of situations requires a certain emotional bearing, a facing to a crisis. And we know crisis can have either devastating, or life enhancing results. What determines these results in a great part is whether we try to take on it all ourselves, or if we reach out to the right person. Facing this uncertain emotion then can scalp our psyche into new, unimaginable ways that make room for growth.

Here’s how playing hero affects the basic plan: caring of others creates mental exhaustion, toxic emotions are taken in from the person helped into the one playing hero, creating a dangerous emotional state, engagement in one’s own work diminishes and functional structures are ignored, for focus on the other; and the reflex to assist others controls you.

**Helpful tips**

Acknowledge you have a tendency to help others first and this is not necessarily bad, so long as you also take caring of yourself.

Understand taking care of yourself first also benefits everyone else - which is why airlines remind you to put the oxygen mask on you first.

Replace “yes” as an automatic response with “let me think about that”, giving you time to politely decline or accept after some reflection.

Schedule time for your self during the day: meditation, exercise or love making are helpful activities.

Remember you might feel a compulsion to help, but for some situations there can be a person who is better suited to take on the task. Allow room for this to happen, and ask for help yourself when you need to.

**DROPPING THE BALL**

**The problem**

Unlike the other cases of ADT, those who drop the ball usually have actual ADHD.

Those with ADHD may find themselves: love to be busy or in a crisis, have a wide imagination yet it’s difficult to see it thorough, are impulsive and tend to procrastinate.

They can have recurring thoughts of self-condemnation, which can assure them as an explanation for underachievement, as a pathological comfort. And yet they can be very tenacious, determined to take action when the need comes.

From early one they may learn to fight for themselves, whether for attention in the family or to achieve education goals; living up to their own expectations. They can excel at the creative arts.

Not knowing how to explain to others or themselves their inability to stick through a project, they can turn to self-assailment, labeling themselves as selfish or emotionally inadequate. In turn, they can also have great insight into others, being able to perceive lies or intention within a moment's notice, but may refuse to share these sentiments for fear of retaliation of some sort.
Often undiagnosed people with ADHD actually fill up the lines of prisons, unemployment and even addicts; all unaware of their condition, as well as their potential.

There are benefits and downsides to the trait of ADHD: on the one hand they are creative, novelty searchers, and both a source and receptor for inspiration; while on the other hand they can be easily distracted, make impulsive decisions, and prone to procrastination.

**The solution**
Medication is recommended for ADHD, it helps the person focus. Other points of attack are to get an ADHD coach (properly selected), which will help provide a functional structure, including positive human contact, an exercise routine, nutrition, and so on. Meditation and learning to be mindful is recommended.

It is also important, aside from sorting out the issues with focus, to work on the person's self-image. As stated before, those with ADHD may resort to self-criticism as a way of explaining their inability to focus, and this negative, unrealistic image can prevail even after they are on a road of overall success. So a mental health professional would sit down, listen and bear the pain of those conflicts, and help reframe them to a healthier concept.

Here's how ADHD affects the basic plan: the condition provides exuberant energy, but have great difficulty in controlling it, emotions go up and down unsteadily same with engagement, and of course a lack of basic structure (lists, schedules) to function.

**Helpful tips**
Learn about the condition of ADHD, but beware of the sources. The book "Delivered from Distraction" (same author) is a good start.

Accept that the lack of focus that often happens has nothing to do with moral or character failure; it is merely part of the trait.

Find and work with professionals who work with a positive trait approach. This can include psychiatry but also coaching, and within those find the right professional.

Don't focus on what you're bad at, but rather do what you're good at.

**TRAINING YOUR ATTENTION**
Three elements combine to create mental focus. These are novelty, structure and motivation.

Focus can go from absence of focus - or being adrift - to total engagement. While we are adrift, or taking a break for example, our brain is doing a lot of work: it builds up mental energy. That's why breaks are important.

Total engagement is also called "flow" state, a state in which one is so immersed in the task at hand that sight is loss of everything else.

Although we can't always be in flow state, we can learn how to enter it more often. We do this by finding activities that are important, but also challenging to us; so we have to 'stretch'.
We all can enter the state of flow, but because it can be rare and physiologically costing, we will focus on a similar term - flexible focus, which provides some benefits of flow to immerse on a task, while still maintaining ability to pay attention to other things.

So it's very helpful, enhancing our creative abilities without letting us be sidetracked, maintaining a capacity for mental stillness.

There's many tips we can use to achieve this focus: turn off your electronics for quality focus time, trust your own way of doing things, take breaks, take your own time, don't be afraid of asking for help, and don't be afraid of taking in difficult tasks - they actually help engagement, talk to yourself (engages a different part of the brain), close your eyes to restore focus, draw pictures, and finally, don't mind what's "supposed to work", do what works for you.

Being open-minded and open to look into your own path is a key trait of both focus and focused successful people. They are willing to trust their gut.

Flexible focus is best achieved when we have taken care of ourselves, creating a structure that allows for the freest travel of information in our brain. Think about this: "What are the obstacles that are jamming up information from flowing freely in my mind?", and work to remove them.

The 5 elements in the basic plan are the main ingredients to a free flowing, productive mind. You could mix up one or two additional seasonings, sure; but what is certain is no single main ingredient should be omitted:

Monitor your brain's energy supply, paying attention to sleep, eating habits, meditation, cognitive engagement and positive human contact.

Regulate your emotions, stay balanced, and work at a place high on trust and low on fear.

Work with engagement: by doing what you love to do, feel good at doing towards a mission, you'll perform at your sweet spot.

Create an environment for yourself that allows for mental focus, taking back the control you had given away. This is structure.

Exercising control is the base of the 5 element plan. Modern life tends to function in a way where we unwittingly give out control and lose focus of our own goals.

**RETRAINING YOUR BODY**

**Sleep**

Too often we over rely on coffee, energy drinks or even pills to stay focused. Instead we should apply certain everyday steps to serve as maintenance for our mental energy, which should not be taken for granted.

This is where the body comes in. It knows things that your brain doesn't, and can alert you to what you need to take care off. Energy management has a preventive stage and a maintenance stage.

A lack of sleep can bring about irritability, distractibility and memory problems, as well as physical issues because it hurts appetite and the immune system.
You may think that's fine and dandy but there's just not enough time in your schedule. Understand this: Over the past decade sleep research has boomed. Scientists see that sleep affects creativity, emotions, health, learning and problem-solving, essential qualities to a human being. Sleep might be more important to your life than what you eat, or even how much money you make. You may want to reset your priorities.

**Helpful tips**
Setup regular bedtime and wake-up time, to create a routine.

Don't use your bed for work.

Before bed: don't eat, don't exercise heavily or drink alcohol for four hours before sleep.

Do not sleep with the TV on, instead take a bath or do some reading. If you have trouble sleeping, go to another room and read for a while.

Nap-time in midafternoons is good. Meditation can also be an alternative.

If there's trouble sleeping you can play soothing music, there's an app called Dreampad for this. Other remedies are valerian root, or, as a last resort, prescription medicine. If there are further sleep problems consult with your doctor, but try to get a holistic solution.

**Nutrition**
In today's world many people have a poor care of what they take in to their bodies. They can talk about a supplement their taking but then they fill themselves with sugar-packed sodas and Doritos, and take care not for fruits or vegetables. They are filling up their bodies, but their brain is starving.

**Helpful tips**
Drink juice. This allows you to make the most of a food (fruits/vegetables). Using a juicer might be a good option.

Avoid packaged and processed foods. A large study on diets showed that vegan is best. You may not want to go completely vegan, but even tilting towards it will help.

On meat: pork, chicken and fish are preferable over cow.

Consider eliminating gluten and dairy. Even the author of this book has not cut off from all of this, so it really depends on what works for you. Nonetheless, it certainly helps.

Eat locally. This is to avoiding chemicals that can block your body from actually absorbing nutrients, dominant in big markets.

Mind your glucose level. You want to maintain it balanced throughout the day. You achieve this by eating more fresh fruits and vegetables, eating protein at breakfast; and avoiding excess caffeine and carbohydrates. If you have "blah" (low energy) moments, these indicate a lowering of glucose. Fight them with a fruit snack or some exercise.

**Exercise**
Science has proven extensively the benefits that exercise has on brain function, and if we look at cases of mental issues we can often find that healthier phases correlate with some form of physical activity.
Now for many people the idea of working out is boring, and that's understandable. The trick to this, rather than focusing on the workout itself, is to make it fun. You can start with simply taking morning walks with a friend for example, or scheduling some sports game with them. A different way is to work with a trainer, which increases motivation for some.

Sex also counts as exercise. It fills your body with beneficial hormones, so enjoy it as much as you can.

RETRAINING YOUR MIND

Meditation
Meditation can lower blood pressure, stress, help with anxiety and depression, increase energy, happiness, and cognitive and psychological function.

How to meditate
Sit in a comfortable chair free of distraction. Lay both feet on the floor and hands on your lap. Close your eyes and concentrate on your breath... In, then out. As thoughts pass by, let them.

Doing this a couple times for three to five minutes a day will make you feel better and focus better.

Stimulation
Doing something that requires mental stretching will keep your mind fit, fending off decay and maintaining focus.

Take up lessons in something you've never been involved in before: a new language, music or any other skill. You can check out online courses for some good examples (try coursera.org).

Alternatively try brain-stimulating games. Such as the more modern "mental workout" apps, or other traditional games like Sudoku or chess. Or even a crossword puzzle.

RETRAINING HUMAN CONNECTION

The power of connection produces more good than anything else, and you can tell this by observing the effects of disconnection: researchers have found that children raised lacking in cuddling, neglected; developed less white matter in their brain than those who received normal care.

Research in social science has even proven that isolation can be as harmful for health as cigarettes or high blood pressure.

Connection can be human of course, but it can also be a connection to a poem, to an idea, a tradition, or anything else. And it will still benefit productivity and happiness. Many organizations have made a change in their culture towards connection, and it has shown in decreased rate of depression, suicide, and a boost in productivity.

On the other hand social networks tend to magnify whatever is going on, whether it be positive or negative, so it is important to choose friends wisely.

Helpful tips
Make time for your connections. Schedule out friends and family in your weekly planning. We schedule many things that are less important, but frequently forget about connection.
Do not worry alone. When we worry on our own we quickly become paralyzed by fear, and our IQ sinks. When we worry with the right person our confidence, as well as our ability to deal with the worry, go up instantly.

Share meals with others. Make time to eat with a friend or family, making human moments a part of your daily life.

Spend time outside. Take nature in, along with its beneficial mental nutrients. Also having a pet is a connection that incentivizes this point.

Have a best friend at work. Cultivate this relationship even if it cuts a little on your work time. As you do, you will have something to look forward to at work every week.

Join an organization or group. Something that you care enough to make time for, you contribute to and is fun for you.

One caveat in the power of human connection is that we need to carefully choose whom we trust. Trust is a valuable resource, place it on the wrong person and you can wind up getting hurt. Still, when you have a right person to worry with, the mere act of doing so works wonders.

Also being grateful for what we have is a source of human happiness. Whether it be our friends, the nature that surrounds us, or whatever is part of our life, be grateful that it is.

Remember to monitor your energy. This way you will anticipate when you are most energetic, and use that time accordingly, and your subconscious will also plan ahead of when you can be relaxed.

**RETRAINING YOUR HEART**

Few things motivate us like emotions. We are not machines; one of the most determining factors of our performance in any given task is how we feel while doing it. If we feel bad, our focus goes towards anxiety or anger, towards ourselves, whilst when we feel good engagement rises; you work better.

When negative emotion takes over the brain is hijacked into a more primitive state, controlled by a more animalistic, reactionary force. We can say things we regret later and hurt people we, probably, did not mean to hurt. In addition to hurting your focus, these negative emotions also correlate with a higher risk of heart disease and a slower recovery from it.

**Helpful tips**

Work with your emotions, not against them. If you like groups work in groups, if you value privacy find ways to work in private. If you like being outdoors, then create structures to work with that. Be true to yourself.

Dig in to your past. Grab a friend who knows you well and get him to ask you questions about your childhood. Issues that came up then and might still be affecting you today. Clearing these out will strengthen your focus significantly, and help you know yourself.

Accept help from others. The people who make the biggest messes are usually those who won’t take any advice from others, who rather fail than reconsider their current track. A little humility goes a long way.

Never punish someone for being telling you the truth. People avoid truth all the time, with mechanisms like paranoia and denial. In paranoia people think others are out to get them, when it’s actually the other
way around. In denial we simply refuse to see what’s right in front of us. If someone takes the chance to let you know when you do something wrong, don’t punish them for it. They are helping you build a stronger self.

Keep your cool. During the day, as your energy drains out your body start switching from your calmer, cooler state. Have a healthy snack, do some exercise; enjoy some human connection or YouTube a funny video. Anything that works for you to stay at your best mood.

Work in your sweet spot. At work, one good shot is what keeps you coming back. When you leave work try to keep in mind the good shot you made that day, rather than any failure. Your mind will gradually associate work with success, and because of the positive emotions, be at the same time more open to learning from any mistakes. Focus on the good, and you can take on the not-so-good.

Remember to try and find a balance between what you love doing, what you are talented at doing, and what you are paid to do. The center point encompassing all these three is the sweet spot, and you want to maintain it or be as close to it as possible. Have a conversation with your manager, locate good jobs, or find the excitement in the one you have.

**WORKING WITH STRUCTURE**

If opportunities are fish, then the net with which we catch them is structure. So what is structure? Structure is a closed door, a day set aside to rest, an open door, the idea that there is a time and place for everything. It is what creates order out of chaos. Everyday your brain will fire up billions of signals, constantly, and we have no choice in this. But we can choose how to use this energy, how to best employ our time in order to achieve our goals.

Structure is the environment we create around ourselves to promote focus. Without it our emotions float aimlessly, action quickly bursts up then disappears into inaction, and intention finds no direction to head towards.

**Helpful tips**

Schedule it. Say you have a goal of working out. But of course thinking about how and when to do it makes you anxious. If you appoint it to Wednesday and Saturday morning, you don’t have to worry about it any longer, you simply do it at the appointed time, as it was an appointed task. It’s kind of making the decision in advance.

Set your goals. They can be short, medium, long term or even for lifetime. One way to do it is three goals for each timeframe (daily, bi-weekly, and 6-12 month’s period).

Monitor your progress. Review the tasks every so often, this will improve your focus and make sure you stay on track.

Be creative. Structure works even well when it’s personalized, so do what works for you, how it works for you. Also make it fun, this will wire you to plan better.

CDE. Curtail, delegate and eliminate. In modern times people allow their schedules to be filled up with endless activities that don’t always have a purpose. Carefully keep an eye on what you are spending your time on, examine if it truly is necessary, take out what isn’t, and leave an open space. Take your time.

You can also download the CrazyBusy app that is designed to help create and measure structure.
CONCLUSION

Some helpful tips to remember as way of concluding:

Understand that stimulus does not equal substance. Some immediate pleasures are worth having, while others divide you from your goals.

Order your priorities. In spite of what you are immersed with day to day, remember why you are doing it, and what of it is important.

Take care of yourself. Learn the value of saying no and keeping your own center.

Allow yourself free time, this will boost up your focus… Remember most times it’s not about working harder but smarter. Take things in their own time.

Remember the basic plan: energy, emotion, engagement, structure, and control. Make time for them… Keep them healthy, and you’ll be just fine.

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