

Focus and get rid of distractions while working from home

Author: Tatenda Emma Matika . January 2021

It is January 2021 and we have already started the year with a lockdown because of the pandemic. After the festive season, our minds need a lot of work getting back in focus for the work that awaits us as we start the year. Most organizations start the year with a Strategy Meeting, to make plans and budgets for the year. While the strategy awakens our minds to the amount of work there is to do, it does not always energize us to be willing to do the work efficiently, especially while working from home. It is very easy to give in to distractions. In this article, we discuss focus, distractions and some of the methods and tools we can use to get back on track with our work during this lockdown period.

The moment we give in to distractions, we lose focus and it can be difficult to get our minds back on to the tasks we want to work on. Some researchers state that focus can be categorized into top-down focus and bottom-up focus. Top-down focus is the type that is internal and intentional. It is a choice. This is the kind of focus that allows us to work on our daily tasks, according to set goals. We make a plan and sit down, discarding any distractions, while we pursue our work. This is the type of focus that everyone desires and it is difficult sometimes, but we can train ourselves to attain it.

Bottom-up focus comes from external sources. When a phone rings, when someone calls your name or when you think of a movie or good food whilst you are working, the mind easily shifts to focus on those things. It is involuntary and is what we normally call distractions. Distractions slow us down and if we do not find a way to channel our attention back to our tasks, we do not make progress.

There are several reasons why we can lose focus. In this lockdown period, the main reasons can be distractions and too much multitasking. We want to watch movies, raise children, cook, clean and do our work simultaneously. For ladies staying at home with parents or guardians, we know that it is difficult to get them to understand the concept of working from home. On top of distractions, there might be some household chores that one will have to work on. This always leads to little or no progress with our work. Other reasons can be:

- Procrastination
- Not prioritizing our work
- Time management problems
- Lack of motivation

Distractions can be both intentional and unintentional. Sometimes we know the goals and the work that we want to focus on, but it can be difficult to bring ourselves to do it. That's when we start to look for reasons to start delaying. We can start by checking our phones and then we end up on social media, which ends up taking up a lot of time that was supposed to be for work.

There are many self-help books that talk about how a person can start focusing on the right work they

have to do. Reading books can help to boost our motivation and help us concentrate and not give in to distractions. Some of these books are:

- The Effective Executive: The Definitive Guide to Getting the Right Things Done by Peter F Drucker
- The One Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results by Gary Keller with Jay Papasan
- Do the Work: Overcome Resistance and Get Out of Your Own Way by Steven Pressfield
- The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R Covey
- The 5am Club by Robin Sharma
- The Willpower Instinct: How Self Control Works by Kelly McGonigal

The key takeaways from these books are that

- We can control our minds and channel them to be focused
- We can overcome distractions
- How we start our days determines how productive we are

One obvious point to note is that getting ourselves to start reading one of these books might also be a challenge. We might end up losing focus and not finishing the books.

Dandapani, a motivational speaker, explains some concepts very well. He talks about how we can control our minds to focus. We choose to focus on certain things that might distract us and we also choose to focus on our actual work. He talks about the law of practice, that says we become good at what we spend most of our time doing. If we train ourselves to focus on social media for hours a day, we end up becoming good at distractions. Bottom-up focus is external, but that does not mean that the sources cannot be removed. We can choose to not look at our phones when working. We can even put them on silent so that notifications do not disturb us. We can choose to lock ourselves in a room where children will not be able to access while we work so that we focus on the important tasks.

He also talks about training the mind to focus. The first step is to focus on one thing for a short period, daily, not giving in to distractions. We can start with a short period and increase that time up to the limit we want. He also talks about how we start our mornings. We can choose to start by looking at our phones or to start with other tasks. The task one chooses to start the day will influence how the mind will work for the rest of the day. Our minds can be trained to be active or passive depending on what we consume into them. Things such as TV train our minds to be passive, which reduces productivity.

Intentional distractions are usually a result of being lazy. And this is usually a result of how we start the day. The book, The 5am Club discusses how waking up early and also exercising can help one to

become productive. Once the day starts productively, it becomes easier to not pay attention to distractions and keep focusing on work.

Some other tips on how to be focused are:

- Plan your day the night before
- Switch off the distractions
- Work on one task at a time
- Use visual reminders
- Set a time for tasks
- Do tasks as soon as possible

These tips will help you during this lockdown period to stay focused and be productive.

Tatenda Emma Matika is a Business Analytics Trainee at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd a management and human resources consulting firm.

References

Dandapani: How to control your mind. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYfYmYbp7C4>

<https://freedom.to/blog/why-cant-i-focus-8-reasons-and-solutions-for-the-distracted-brain/>

<https://greatperformersacademy.com/books/20-must-read-books-on-personal-productivity-and-focus>

<https://www.americanexpress.com/en-us/business/trends-and-insights/articles/increase-your-focus-reduce-distractions-tips/>

<https://thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/Focus-And-Get-Rid-Of-Distractions-While-Working-From-Home>