Distractions, Disruptions, and Other Time Wasters

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Did you ever ask yourself, where did the day go? Even though you had high hopes of getting stuff done, you didn't clear your plate…again. Even though you worked tirelessly throughout the day, time simply got away from you. Sound familiar? It doesn't matter if you're at the office or doing chores at home, you have only so many hours in the day. If your time is spent efficiently, you're home free. But distractions and disruptions can easily hijack your day.

While it's easy to blame the hijacking on interruptions, fire drills, and problems that came out of left field, the real reason most stuff doesn't get done *isn't* due to external forces — it's your own doing. In other words, we have no one to blame except ourselves.

Those who waste the most time are usually the first to complain of having too little.

Self-Imposed Timewasters

Here are 10 ways that daily distractions sidetrack you from getting things done.

1. **Interruptions.** Some people look up every time a new email or text arrives. Or they gossip with friends who aren't busy — even though *they* are.
2. **Avoidances.** Some folks do *easy things* first, even though they're unimportant. They also do stuff they *enjoy* rather than things that have to get done.
3. **Disorganization.** Some people spend valuable time searching for computer files or items they've misplaced. It never occurs to them to clean up their act.
4. **Procrastination**. Some folks spend much of their day putting out fires when many of those problems could've been addressed when they were small. Do you spend more time lighting fires or putting them out?
5. **Emotion.** Some people spend precious time reliving the past or worrying about the future. Do you spend more time stressing about work or doing it?
6. **Mindset.** Some folks add unnecessary things to their to-do list and then complain about how overwhelmed they are. How about subtracting some items?
7. **Emergencies.** Some people let others hijack their day. Just because it says URGENT doesn't necessarily mean it's important. Poor planning on your part shouldn't constitute an emergency for others.
8. **Attention span.** Some folks check their social media feeds, respond to comments, and laugh at jokes texted to them. They let themselves get interrupted all day long.
9. **Multitasking.** Some people think that looking busy makes them more productive.
10. **Perfection.** Some folks strive for perfection rather than excellence. They never seem to get stuff done.

10 Powerful Ways to Reduce Distractions and Remain on Course

- **Identify distractions.** You can't address distractions if you're unaware of them.
- **Prioritize.** It's less important to get *everything* done than to make sure you get the *right things* done.
- **Plan your week; schedule your day.** Determine your <u>priorities</u> for the week and set daily goals. Make sure to review your activity and apply lessons learned each day.
- **Focus.** Tackle one thing at a time — single-tasking.
- **Take scheduled breaks.** Schedule *planned* breaks to check voicemail, email, and texts, as well as to return calls.

Minimize distractions:

1. **Do not disturb.** If people know you're swamped or on a tight deadline — beforehand — they're less inclined to hijack your time.
2. **Learn to say "no."** It's nice to be needed. But don't try to make everyone happy at the expense of your own needs.
3. **Delegate.** Increase your productivity by <u>delegating</u> tasks to others. In addition, if you can't satisfy a request, suggest an alternative way of satisfying it.
4. **Clean your clutter.** Declutter. If you know things distract you, put them away. As they say, "Out of sight, out of mind." Furthermore, clear your mental clutter too. Meditation and/or exercise will increase your productivity.
5. **Prioritize what NOT to do.** Know the things that distract you most and eliminate or minimize those activities.
6. **Control your technology.** Set constraints on technology use.
7. **Set artificial deadlines.** There is great truth to Parkinson's Law, "Work expands to fill the time available for its completion." Therefore, create artificial deadlines to ensure progress.
8. **Measure advancement.** Measure progress — not the time that you're working.
9. **Reiterate your goals.** Review your goals on an ongoing basis to ensure that you're still on course.
10. *Be disciplined.* If you don't get something done, it's not that you don't have time; you just chose to spend it doing something else.

Those who begin things, but never complete them, accomplish nothing.