

# A Remedy for Distraction - When Time Management Isn't Enough, Do This Instead

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We now have the opportunity to fill every waking moment with something... anything. Idle time doesn't exist anymore. Powering down and turning off comes with this looming sense of guilt that "I should be doing something." As if our sense of self is not just subtly, but wholly tied up in doing. The philosopher Blaise Pascal said this:

"All men's miseries derive from not being able to sit in a quiet room alone."

A deeper part of us knows that being perpetually distracted isn't right, but also knows what happens in those moments of quiet. That we'll actually have to face what we've been ignoring for so long. That we'll come face to face with our insecurities, feelings not felt, and dreams we've set aside while we plug away being a model citizen and believer in the good ol' American dream.

Comedian Louis CK says this beautifully in a conversation with Conan O'Brien about [why he hates cell phones](#). He calls it the forever empty... the knowledge that it's all for nothing and you're all alone.

While I don't necessarily agree with the whole life is terrible and painful bit, there is definitely something "down there" we would love to continue avoiding. We're afraid to not pick up our phones because of this feeling that comes creeping up and somehow, these little rectangular devices give us a seeming lapse, a free pass, a moment where we don't have to pay attention to what's really going on. Whether it's your phone, computer, or just the bragging rights of being busy, how do you know if you're truly distracted?

A brief self-assessment

If right now you're saying to yourself... "I'm not distracted, I'm just busy." Well then, consider this the politest form of calling bullshit there is and a cordial invitation to unbridled curiosity about the truth.

If you've run into either of these scenarios, it may be time to put yourself in check...

Imagine this... You go to pull out your phone to check the weather, respond to your last text, rummage through your inbox... to just do **ONE** thing. You have all the best intentions of hopping on for just a second, and then one of two things happen.

#1: You do the one thing, but then... you get hooked, you make the rounds, you check your email, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and the next thing you know, you're wondering... "**WTF just happened?**"

#2: You get on your phone and instead of doing just that one thing, you do 15 other things... You make the rounds, only to arrive at the unfortunate realization that you have absolutely no idea why you got on your phone in the first place.

And just in case neither of those ring a bell, then try one of these on for size

- You find yourself going down the rabbit hole of the internet and hours later you emerge feeling like you have no idea what just happened
- The same item makes it from your to do list one day to the next... to the next... to the next... you get the idea...
- You read something and have to continually re-read the same paragraph over and over again
- You easily get pulled away from the task at hand and it takes you a long time to get back in the saddle
- You have an increasing sense of anxiety and can't pinpoint where its coming from

If you can relate with any of the above scenarios consider this... you're distracted. Before I go any further, I want to define distraction.

But first... put your phone on airplane or if you're on your desktop, open a new window. I want your undivided attention for this one.

What is distraction?

For the sake of this article I'm going to define distraction as this... anything that prevents you from giving **your full attention** to something else.

Clearly our attention is being hijacked by a lot of things. The irony of it all is, it's not what you think that's really preventing you from giving your full attention to what really needs to be done. We're very quick to pick up the next hack, tip or trick for a quick fix, but we're being distracted because something else is trying to get our attention.

When I realized I was distracted...

As 2017 came to a close, I felt this creeping sensation that my focus was in the dumps. It was more difficult to keep my attention on what needed to get done, stay committed to my goals, and complete projects than ever before.

I was dropping the ball on important personal and professional projects.

I would be in mid-meaningful conversation with someone and literally drift off, completely losing track of what they were saying.

I was getting more anxious, overwhelmed, and easily distracted.

Constantly jumping on my phone, checking my email at the worst times ever, got me in the cycle of reacting to everyone else's demands and never quite settling into what really needed to get done.

At first I wrote it off as the holidays and didn't think much of it. It seemed like a logical conclusion or at the very least a convenient excuse. I buckled down and pushed through.

When 2018 rolled around, Christmas passed and the New Year was underway. But I was still feeling anxious, distracted, and couldn't focus to save my life.

The last and final straw was this...

I pulled out my phone to check the weather before getting my daughter dressed for school and I instantly went to Instagram, then Facebook and the next thing I knew, I was hooked. I made the rounds to all my usual apps, eventually locking my screen thinking... ***What did I just open my phone for?***

This ridiculous lack of self-control resulted in me wanting to hurl my phone across the room. It's a good thing I didn't though. My AppleCare just expired, so that would've sucked. Needless to say, something had to change.

On some level, distraction is a habit. Something that can easily be remedied through employing your own personalized recipe of time management tools, minimizing distractions, eliminating intrusions, and crafting the ideal environment for the task.

BUT... distraction is also just a symptom of some deeper ailment, or a deep cry from the depths of what Louis C.K. so beautifully calls the Forever Empty. It's the flame of our spirit wanting to be whole.

You don't know what's there until you pay attention

Distraction occurs on many levels, and here's what I've found really useful. It happens on the surface and in the depths. If you've already tried time blocking, the Pomodoro Technique, supplements to increase focus, perfecting your morning routine, and just straight up pushing harder, then it's time to go a bit deeper.

There's likely something that's been trying to get your attention in an ever so subtle way. Maybe it's loud as fuck and you've decided to tune it out anyway. In either case, let's get to it.

In my recent article, [3 Steps From Blame to Accountability](#), I talked about how I discovered I was playing the blame game and a few steps to put that in check. I won't retell the whole story here, but you can reference that one for a deeper context.

Before I discovered the undercurrents of anger, frustration, disappointment, shame, and judgement, I was decent at managing my time, but tended to focus on the wrong activities, and the feeling of accomplishment didn't quite stick. It wasn't until I was willing to dive into the depths and really feel all the feels that a new level of power and passion came through. As Joseph Campbell so beautifully says...

“The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek.”

Looking back, it wasn't that I was doing something I didn't enjoy, or that I was inherently bad at focusing on what actually needed to get done, but I was keeping myself busy and letting myself get distracted because there was some heavy shit I didn't want to look at. In this case, it was easier to point the finger than it was to hold myself accountable.

In conclusion...

The fortunate side effects of employing my own recipe for being more productive and choosing to tune out any potential interruptions, along with the willingness to get in touch with what I would have in the past considered “negative” emotions were the following.

It was a lot easier to get focused in and stay with timelines on different projects. The spots where I would stop or allow myself to do something else to switch it up were noticeable. These were the places where I would normally let myself get distracted. I could see myself about to get out of the flow and the choice was simple. Stay focused... even just a little bit longer. The only way I can describe it physically is that an old sticking point was cleaned up allowing me to go deeper and stay on task longer.

I felt more comfortable with and it was easier to make hard choices in my life and business. It was easier to make swift, more timely decisions where I would normally put things off or not make a decision all together. There was a new feeling of being ok no matter which choice I made. It was easier to make mistakes and move forward.

My relationships got way better. It was easier for me to assert myself, express how I really felt and communicate my needs. Where in the past I would not speak up or try and get my needs met in other ways that were covert and less than ideal.

But the biggest thing of all was rediscovering my values. In the process of re-assigning blame and owning all the emotions and feelings I didn't want to see, let alone feel, I found out how much I loved my daughter and how important she is to me.

I discovered that my favorite part about being a dad is the ability to be the creator of amazing experiences and surprises that quite literally light up the world for another human being.

Up until that point, I would say that I loved my daughter, but it wasn't necessarily something we shared. It was even something I craved and wanted. Quite frankly, I wanted my daughter to love me and respect me, but I didn't know how.

After moving through the experience I outlined in [3 Steps From Blame to Accountability](#), our connection was deeper. In many ways, this was the first time I saw her as an individual and that is a beautiful thing.

Going beneath the surface, digging deeper and getting present enough with the truth to feel the full range of emotions that is the human experience connected all the dots.

I share this with you today for a few reasons. If you've find yourself easily distracted and you've tried the conventional time management stuff, don't give up. Just know that sometimes it's not what's on the surface that needs to be adjusted, but something deeper that requires love. And that thing you may have pushed away could hold the treasure you've been looking for.

If there's a conversation you've been avoiding, or if you find yourself beating the drum of the same emotion or pattern continually, get curious about it, get to know it. Most of all... **REALLY** feel it.

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