

WOMEN WHO LEAD SUMMIT

# HOW TO WORK WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING

PRESENTATION BY ELLEN GOODWIN

WORKSHEETS  
AND  
BONUS BOOK CHAPTER

# HOW TO WORK WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING

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Two things that can positively impact your productivity the most:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

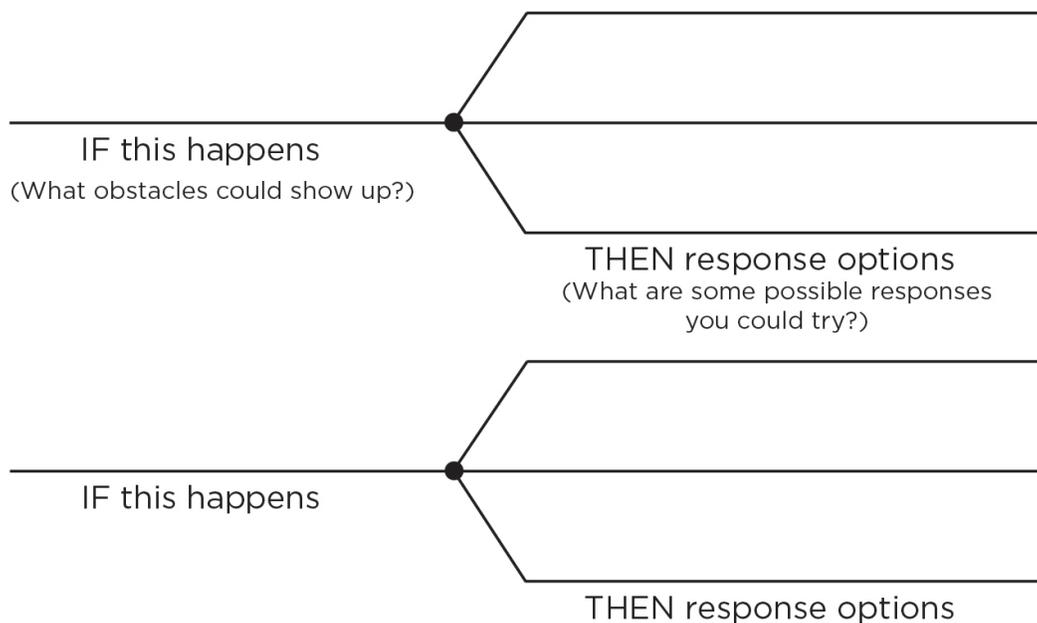
## 3 Ways to Overcome Procrastination

1. Eliminate \_\_\_\_\_

Ways to do that:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Build an If/Then Plan:



2. Give up on \_\_\_\_\_

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Failure is just a \_\_\_\_\_

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When you fail you learn another \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Schedule \_\_\_\_\_

How to : \_\_\_\_\_

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Make your distractions \_\_\_\_\_

How to: \_\_\_\_\_

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**When you are proactive in Overcoming Procrastination, you have more time to get things done, even if no one is watching you.**

## The Power of Focus

Focus cannot co-exist with \_\_\_\_\_

The key: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Tools you need for focus:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Two different types of timing sessions:

1. 30 minutes of focus, then a break \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2.  $(10+2)*5$  \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Focus allows you to expand your perception of time -  
and enables you to get more things done.**

Bonus Productivity Tool: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Ellen Goodwin is a Productivity Trainer, TEDx speaker, and author who uses neuroscience-based principles to enable individuals and businesses to overcome all types of procrastination, build stronger habits, and be more focused so that they can be more efficient and effective with their time. Ellen believes that when it comes to productivity, there is no one-size-fits-all solution, which is why she advocates for experimentation to find the tools and techniques which will work seamlessly with your life and your business, no matter what you want to accomplish. She recently released her first book, *DONE: How To Work When No One Is Watching*, (now available on Amazon) and is the co-host of The Faster, Easier, Better Show podcast.

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# **DONE**

HOW TO WORK  
WHEN NO ONE  
IS WATCHING

**ELLEN GOODWIN**

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## CHAPTER THREE

# Procrastination II: Dealing with Distractions

*And every day, the world will drag you by the hand,  
yelling, “This is important! And this is important!  
And this is important! You need to worry about this!  
And this! And this!” And each day, it’s up to you to  
yank your hand back, put it on your heart and say,  
“No. This is what’s important.”*

- Iain Thomas, *author, designer*

Distractions are trouble when it comes to getting things done.

There are two types of distractions that you encounter every day—distractions you can control and distractions you can't control.

Distractions of Choice are the distractions you choose to have in your life, and you could control if you wanted to. These include, but are not limited to, assorted devices such as cellphones, tablets, computers, video games, television, social media of all kinds, as well as anything you do or use that takes away your attention, including books, magazines, or people.

The Unexpected Distractions that you can't control are things such as interruptions by your coworkers or clients or boss that throw off your planned-out schedule; your child getting sick; a repair person taking up your morning as you wait for them to show up in their 9-11 a.m. “window,” getting a flat tire, missing the morning train, or fielding calls from random robo callers.

Distractions, whatever their type, are the leading cause of procrastination. They interrupt focus, discourage attention, and frustrate attempts to get things done. Knowing what type of distraction you're dealing with and how to best handle it are skills you'll be happy to understand and use.

So, what distractions are you really dealing with?

### Exercise: Track Your Distractions

Once you can identify and classify your distractions, it's much easier to develop a plan to work around them, minimize them, or ignore them. The easiest way to determine your distractions is through the simple act of tracking them.

Just like tracking your food in a food log or tracking your time at work, tracking your distractions helps you to be conscious about the things you unconsciously do every day.

Tracking when, where, and how you get distracted throughout the day is both helpful and eye opening.

The only tools you need for tracking are a piece of paper and a pen. Going analog in this way, instead of using an app or a document on your phone or computer, eliminates a Moment of Choice when you tally a distraction.

For at least three days, write down each time you get distracted. Note where you are, what the distraction is, and what your reaction to it was ("stopped working on my report"). Also note whether it was a Distraction of Choice or an Unexpected Distraction. If you feel so inclined, you can also note how long it took you to bring your attention back to what you had been working on.

That's it. Pay attention to what the distraction was, where you were, and when you got distracted.

TIME	WHERE	WHAT (CHOICE/UNEXPECTED)	RESULT
9:45 a	office	Phone notification unexpected	Returned call, had to make two more. Lost 1/2 hour
11:15 a	Clients office	unexpected meeting unexpected	Rearrange whole afternoon schedule
1:24 p	office	Checked email choice	16 minutes on email
2:12 p	office	Coworker stopped by unexpected	12 minutes
7:40 p	home	Checked social media choice	No time to do research I had planned to do 45 minutes

## Why This Helps

Tracking your distractions like this is helpful for two reasons.

First, after completing three days of tracking, you'll have a better understanding of how often you get distracted and by what. This valuable information will help you to be prepared to overcome, ignore, or minimize those distractions in the future.

For example, if you know that you get distracted by notifications on your phone, you can turn all notifications off, or start putting your phone in airplane mode during the time you need to be focused. If you get distracted by favorite websites, you can preemptively block them. If you know a coworker stops by at a particular time every day, you can take steps to make yourself unavailable at this time.

Second, the mere act of tracking when you get distracted will help you to minimize the power of your distractions. Each time you note a distraction, you become more conscious of it. Use this awareness to short circuit the distraction. Let's say you notice that once again a phone notification has captured your attention, you should write it down on your tracking sheet.

Tell yourself, out loud: "That was a distraction, it's over, now back to work."

When you notice and call out a distraction (as weird as it might feel), you are more likely to minimize its ability to take your time and your focus.

After three days, you'll start to see where your mind wanders, and where your automatic response is to give in to distractions. Use this information to make a defensive Action Plan to protect your attention and your focus from distractions of all kinds.

## Dealing with the Two Kinds of Distractions

Most Distractions of Choice are best dealt with proactively with actions designed to eliminate or minimize their power. With Unexpected Distractions, your reaction holds the key. Do you let the distraction affect your whole day, or do you respond in a way that keeps you on track? Put another way, do you allow a 10-minute distraction to ruin the next three hours?

This doesn't mean that all Distractions of Choice are always best dealt with proactively. There are times when it's your reactive response, which is important. And by no means is it impossible to deal with Unexpected Distractions

proactively. This chapter leans heavily towards ways to take control of your Distractions of Choice, with most of the tools dealing mainly with them. But don't worry, you can quickly adapt the tools to work with Unexpected Distractions as well.

## The Basics of Distraction

On average, it takes a person about 23 minutes to refocus after they've gotten distracted.<sup>5</sup> It doesn't matter if they have allowed themselves to become distracted by a Distraction of Choice, or if they have unexpectedly been distracted. If you're getting distracted five times during your work day, this translates into almost two hours per day of your time being affected by distractions (and chances are, you're getting distracted a lot more than just five times each day).

It would be great if you could wear blinders so you couldn't get distracted. And while you might think I'm saying blinders just to be funny, it's actually true, blinders would help because you are biologically predisposed to getting distracted.\* You have a tiny, paired structure in the visual field of your brain attached to the optical nerve, called the superior colliculus, which processes and responds to unexpected visual stimuli. The goal of the superior colliculus is to move you toward or away from stimuli, so it either gets engaged or it activates the fight or flight response. Either way, you effectively end up getting distracted.

Distractions of Choice feel good. And you know who loves to feel good? The three-year-old in your brain.

Now, if that three-year-old loves it, how happy is he or she going to be if you take drastic measures to cut out your distractions? Hmm, I'll take "Not very happy at all," for the win—which leaves you with a couple of options here. You can dig your heels in and work to eliminate all your distractions with a draconian "no distractions at any time" effort. Which sounds great, but you'll be pushing back against your inner three-year-old who will do what he or she can to keep the distractions around.

Or you could choose to set a really low bar for blocking your distractions. This allows you to move into a place where you use small actions to make

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\* If you think you are only getting distracted because you are unfocused, isn't it kind of nice to know there is an actual biological reason for your unfocused state? It's not you, it's your brain!

distractions less powerful in a way that doesn't put your inner three-year-old on the offensive. These small actions are all designed to affect how you interact with your Distractions of Choice.

## **Minimize Distraction Time**

What does the low bar I mentioned actually look like? It looks a lot lower than you probably think. Since you are trying to work around the three-year-old in your brain, you aren't going to try to be 50 percent less distracted, or even 25 percent less distracted. No, small is small. You're just going to try to be 10 percent less distracted.

### **1. Become 10 percent less distracted**

Ten percent doesn't sound like much. Ten percent of an hour is six minutes. Six minutes an hour in a full 16-hour day means a little over an hour-and-a-half of undistracted time, which adds up to 10.5 hours per week. It's not for me to tell you how to use this time, but 10.5 hours per week can be a game-changer. In a month, that's over 40 hours of undistracted time that you can use to do, well, anything. Learn a new language, perfect a skill, go for long runs, read good books, meet new people. All of this by being 10 percent less distracted.\*

When you become 10 percent less distracted, you'll start to see immediate results. Really. You'll be procrastinating less so you'll be able to get more done in a shorter amount of time. Once you've gotten 10 percent less distracted, it's easy to start ramping things up to the point where you're 20 percent less distracted. But let's deal with the 10 percent first, and the easiest way to do that is to go for the low-hanging fruit of your digital distractions.

### **Eliminate Digital Distractions**

There are obvious ways to eliminate digital distractions. Unless you've been living under a rock (where I understand the wi-fi is terrible), you already know there are lots of different blockers you can use on your computer to block distracting websites. Apps like Freedom, SelfControl, KeepMeOut and Focus

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\* Is 10 percent too much for you? Then go even smaller. Figure out how to be one percent less distracted. Sometimes I feel like if the whole world was one percent less distracted, we'd be a lot better off. But that's just me. And my soapbox.

all allow you to block sites for amounts of time that you control.\* (I've written most of this book with SelfControl keeping me from clicking on to any of my favorite websites when the three-year-old in my brain decides "we" need a break.)

There are apps designed to help you ignore your phone for longer and longer amounts of time, such as Forest and Siempre. Airplane mode is your friend when it comes to blocking and ignoring. And you can easily turn off the audio notification on your email to ensure you don't get distracted each time a new email comes in.

Doing these simple things can easily move you towards being 10 percent less distracted. However, if you want to become 10 percent less distracted without relying on digital help, find ways to make it 20 seconds harder to become distracted by your Distractions of Choice. During those 20 seconds, you interrupt the automatic response to the distraction, making it less likely you'll lose focus and start to procrastinate.

### **Ways to make it 20 seconds harder to be distracted**

Some of these ideas are going to resonate with you and are going to feel like fun. Some are going to make you wrinkle your nose like you did when your mom served her "famous" liver and onions for dinner. Which is okay. Unlike your mom, I'm not offended. Experiment with the options until you find a few that make you stronger than your Distractions of Choice.

### **Cell Phone**

Why should you make it harder to use your cellphone? First, because depending on which study you believe, adults are on their phones, conservatively, between three to five hours a day. Judging by what I see each day, I think the numbers are much higher. Second, because of the addictive behaviors, the safety issues,<sup>†</sup> and the actual physical strain on your neck. Third, because just having your phone near you lowers your intelligence. The mere presence of a cellphone can change how your brain works.

One study<sup>6</sup> found that college students who took tests while their smart phones were visible on their desks, consistently scored lower than the students

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\* Check Chapter Twelve, the Resources Chapter, for more info on these and other apps.

† Could you please not be looking at your phone while walking in a crosswalk? Thank you.

who took the test with their phones locked in another room. The kicker? It didn't matter if their phones were on or off, they still scored lower. Depending on the study,<sup>7</sup> the scores were sometimes up to a full letter grade lower.

Think about this. It didn't matter if the phones were on or off. The phones just had to be in their line of sight to affect their ability to focus and pay attention.

So, if this is happening in the controlled and seemingly focused environment of academic test-taking, then what is happening to you when you are out in the wilds of your real life and have access to your phone 24/7?

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that you get distracted by your phone, so you're procrastinating and not focusing. To overcome this type of distraction, you need to be proactive and smarter than your phone(s), which, fortunately, isn't difficult.

#### **Ideas to make it 20 seconds harder to use your phone:**

- Keep your phone in airplane mode during predetermined stretches of time during the day.
- Keep your phone out of sight by putting it in another room or locked in a desk drawer.
- Block distractions on your phone with apps like Zero Willpower, Flipd, and Anti-Social.\*
- Buy a minimalist phone. There are several now on the market designed to be nearly distraction-free. Most allow you to phone and text and possibly use GPS. A couple to consider are the LightPhone 2 or the Palm Phone.
- Keep your phone minimally charged so that you can only use it for essential communication.
- Set a passcode on your phone so you have to use the code each time you want to check your phone.
- In social situations, turn your phone off and put it in a zippered pocket or purse.†

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\* Check Chapter Twelve for more information.

† Of course, you could always, I don't know, leave your phone at home? But then how do you call a ride share? Damn, the trials of the 21st century!

- When you drive, keep your phone in the back seat. Of course, if your car syncs up to your phone, this one doesn't apply.
- Engage the "Safe Driver Mode" on your phone so notifications can't come in, and an automatic "I'm driving response" is sent out to whoever is texting you.
- Go black and white. One of the reasons your phone is distracting is because of the bright colors on the screen. Your inner three-year-old is attracted to bright things. Bright distracting things are even more appealing. So, make your phone less interesting by changing the screen to black and white. On an iPhone, go to Settings > General > Accessibility > Accessibility Shortcut > Color Filters on. Now, when you click the Home Button three times, you have the option to change your color filter from color to Black and White. Click three times again to go back to full color. On Android, go to Settings > Accessibility > Vision > Color Adjustment > Gray Scale. Your phone is now black and white until you change it back. With no color, your phone is less appealing, games are downright boring, and everything seems much less fun.
- Discover how long you can go without picking up the phone. Both the Use Carrot or Forest apps can help you find out (and encourage you to work towards longer and longer time frames where you don't pick up your phone).
- Install Siempre, which changes all your icons to simple, boring, black and white icons.
- On any of your devices, turn off or log out of apps and programs each time you're done with them. This way, you always have to go through the log-in when you want to use them. Make it even harder to log-in by making sure the passwords are long and complicated. Now, when you try to remember it or enter it, it's probably going to take you more than 20 seconds to do. This particular tactic works really well because we all have enough trouble remembering short passwords, so long ones effectively shut down any distraction attempts.

- To make it harder to find apps, put them into folders on your phone. Our phones are an extension of ourselves, and we know exactly where things should be, which makes it easy to go right to an app and get distracted. Making this one little change makes your automatic action at least 20 seconds harder to accomplish.

**Ideas to make it 20 seconds harder to get distracted by your computer:**

- Make it a personal rule to have only one tab open on your browser at a time.
- Utilize blockers like Freedom.to, SelfControl, or KeepMeOut.
- When possible, work in a physical location with your computer but no other devices available.
- Work on a computer that doesn't have access to wi-fi.
- Work on your laptop with no access to a power source. When the battery dies, you have no way to get power, so every moment counts.\*

**Ideas to make it 20 seconds harder to watch television/movies/Netflix/Amazon/YouTube**

- Monitor and track how much time you spend watching shows of all kinds on all devices during the week. Try to decrease that number by 20 percent each week.
- Disable auto-play on Netflix, HBO, YouTube, etc.
- Place a book, a crossword puzzle, or notepad on your television-watching chair or sofa. When you want to sit down to watch television, you'll be reminded of the other things you could be doing (and do them because they are right there at your fingertips).
- When you are done watching television each day, put it in the closet (if it's small), or if it's too large to move, cover it up.
- Keep the television unplugged and your devices minimally charged.

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\*This is an excellent way to give yourself a hard deadline to get things done.

- Have someone with more self-control than you be in charge of the remote, so you don't automatically start watching the next show.
- Have someone hide the remote.\*
- Cut your cable. Stop paying for cable so you have to be intentional about your watching on other sources.

Of course, these aren't the only ways you can make distractions harder to do. You can also do that by making them awkward to enjoy.

### **Make it awkward**

Typically, when you're enjoying your Distractions of Choice, you are physically and mentally relaxed. Your body is at ease. Your mind isn't thinking about work projects or being efficient. Because you're relaxed, it's easy to remain in your comfortable, distracted state. (If you've got teenagers at home, they are pros at this.) If things were uncomfortable, you wouldn't want to be distracted by them as much. This is the whole idea behind making your distractions awkward.



### **Making my distraction awkward**

During any election season, I become a news junkie and consume more information than I really should. I don't like listening to the news or watching it on TV, I need to read it, either in print or online. If given a chance, I would settle into my comfy chair and start going from article to article, which, given the amount of material out there, could eat up a full day, and I would procrastinate on everything.

I know and own this, so to make sure this doesn't happen, I do everything I can to make my news reading awkward and uncomfortable.

When I'm in focus or writing mode, I work with a 20 minutes on, five minutes off schedule. I use an interval timer to stay on track, so a bell rings

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\* Of course, technically, you can still turn the television on. But changing the channels is no longer that easy.

when the 20-minute session begins, then another rings to mark the beginning of a five-minute break.\*

The five-minute break is the only time I allow myself to check out any news. But instead of sitting comfortably at my desk and checking out the latest information on my big computer screen, I force myself to use my phone or tablet to read the news. Then, to make it more uncomfortable, I make myself walk back and forth in my living room. As long as I'm reading, I have to be moving. If I stop moving, I have to stop reading. Those are my rules of awkward engagement.

Because I'm walking while reading, I'm not really going to get comfortable, so five minutes is more than enough time for me to catch up on my favorite distraction, and I don't procrastinate on things I need to be doing.

For me, walking and reading keeps me from getting too relaxed and comfortable, so I stay in my "working" state. Walking isn't the only way to do this, whatever your distraction, there's a way to make it awkward.

Look at your Distraction of Choice and pair it with something that makes it awkward to do.

Some options include:

- Standing or standing on one foot
- Standing in the corner (just like taking a time-out)
- Walking (around the house, around the block)
- Holding your hands above your head
- Doing sit-ups or push-ups or squats or burpees
- Enjoying your distraction only if you are outside
- Enjoying your distraction while someone is watching you
- Wearing something that makes it awkward to function like mittens or ski goggles or a motorcycle helmet

For example, let's say video games are your go-to distraction. You love settling in on the couch and getting caught up on the action on the screen all while procrastinating on things you should be doing. To change this up, and make things awkward, try any of the Awkward Distractions listed above.

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\* More about this type of timing interval can be found on page 210 of the Focus chapter.

When you want to binge watch programs or you want to indulge in social media, make it a rule that you have to stand or walk the whole time or do 10 sit-ups or burpees for every minute you're online.

Whatever form of awkwardness you choose, I can almost guarantee that it is going to make it at least 20 percent harder to really get comfortable and give in to your Distractions of Choice.

At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned that one of the reasons distractions disrupt workflow is because of their randomness. What if you could reduce the randomness of your distractions? You'd stop the three-year-old in your brain from hijacking your attention. You'd no longer need 23 minutes to get back on track. And you'd probably be able to get more done. This tactic works best for your Distractions of Choice (vs. Unexpected Distractions).

## **2. Schedule Your Distractions**

This is going to sound a little counter-intuitive, so stay with me here. Instead of letting Distractions of Choice hijack your attention throughout the day, schedule them and give them their own small, dedicated time block.

You're going to need your phone to do this because you're going to set a whole bunch of alarms. Probably more alarms than you've ever set, so be prepared! (And don't get distracted while doing this.)

Go on your phone and set alarms for five minutes before the top of every hour, for example, 9:55, 10:55, etc. Then set another alarm for the top of each hour. You decide the number of hours you're going to do this throughout the day. If you choose to do this for a full eight-hour day, you're going to have 16 alarms going off throughout the day, but it's a small price to pay for being the boss of your Distractions of Choice.

Is there anything magical about scheduling your distractions for 55 minutes after the hour? Not at all. You can plan them however you'd like. Just be sure you have a defined start and stop time for your distractions. There's also nothing magical about doing this for eight hours in your day. Sometimes it's more efficient just to do this during the hours when you need a strong focus and a little help ignoring distractions. You decide what is going to work best for you.

After the alarms are set, you go about your work for the first 55 minutes of the hour, focusing on your most important work. At 55 minutes past, when

the first alarm sounds, you are free to be distracted for five minutes. When the second alarm goes off at the top of the hour, you stop your distraction and go back to work. Your five minute scheduled distraction is up.

### **The secret behind scheduling**

Since you know that you have a break at the end of the hour, and you'll have both the option and the time to indulge in your Distraction of Choice, you're not looking for ways to distract yourself during the time you should be focusing. Your brain is able to settle down, safe in the knowledge that you WILL have time to look at a favorite website, or play a game, check notifications, or talk with a coworker.

Because you have a set time to start and finish, you have boundaries to follow, and you're more likely to be able to force yourself to get back to work, you don't need to rely on feeling "motivated" to get re-started.

With your distractions scheduled, there is nothing random or unplanned. There are no unexpected Moments of Choice where you can lose both focus, and 23 minutes out of your day. You go into your distraction time knowing it's limited, and there is nothing random to contend with. Scheduling your distraction time is one of those ideas which sounds weird, but is really very effective. Experiment with different timing schedules to see what works best for you. Maybe getting distracted for 10 minutes every 45 minutes is better for your schedule. If so, great. Just make sure you schedule your distraction time and only interact with your Distractions of Choice during this time.

### **3. Leverage the power of hard deadlines (or build some artificial ones)**

Last summer, my husband and I invited friends over to hang out on the deck and BBQ with us. These people had never been to our house before, so, of course, we wanted to make a good impression. Before they arrived, we took care of a whole bunch of low-value chores that we had been putting off: a picture got hung, a shelf got cleaned off, a box got moved to the garage, and the porch got swept.

Was there anything that had stopped us from doing any of these tasks before? No, not at all. We had just become immune to the sight of the picture

sitting on the counter and the cluttered shelf. With no hard deadline to push us into action, these things just kept getting put off. The upcoming visit from our friends changed a soft, undefined deadline into a hard and fast one that we had to meet.

The power of a deadline can never be overemphasized.

Having an absolute, must-be-done-by deadline not only compels you to get things done, but it also makes it really easy to ignore distractions. Graduations, weddings, holidays, birthdays, reunions, conferences and meetings all serve as hard deadlines for getting things done. When a task doesn't have an absolute hard and fast deadline, you need to be able to create your own.

In my case, the visit of our friends provided the short-term deadline we needed: we wanted the house to look nice for our guests when they arrived. So, 2 p.m. on the day of their visit became our hard and fast deadline. We knew what needed to be done, and by when, so we couldn't get distracted.

Having guests over is just one situation you can use as a hard deadline. There's plenty more that you can leverage.

- **Upcoming vacations make great deadlines.** Knowing that there is a definite time when you are leaving town makes it easy to accomplish things on the to-do list all while ignoring distractions. Since your time is limited, it's easier to prioritize what has to get done.
- **Shorten your workweek.** If you have control of your work schedule, try shortening your week by a day or occasionally shorten your work day by an hour or two by going into work late or leave early (like you would for a doctor's appointment or your kids' soccer game). Less available time means making smart choices about how you use the time you do have.

I used to go to 1 p.m. "Businessman's Special" baseball games during the summer, which meant I had to leave work by 11 a.m. on game days. I started work by 6 a.m. so I could get my work done for the day by 11. The compressed day made it easy to ignore any and all distractions while working.

- **Use a reward as a deadline:** Get tasks done in the morning by using something you really enjoy as a reward. For example, no coffee or

social media or gossip with coworkers until you have finished a task or achieved a predetermined goal.

- **Co-create deadlines:** Get together with a friend or coworker and declare a hard deadline for a project that currently only has a soft one. Back up your commitment with money or some other penalty for missing the deadline.
- **Action Hours:** Leverage the power of your peers and join with several friends in person or online and commit to an hour where you work individually on tasks of your own choosing. Check in with each other before the hour begins. Discuss what you plan to accomplish during the hour. Do your work for an hour, then check back in with each other when the hour is up. Share what you accomplished, then repeat as needed.

This can also be done virtually via a video call using Zoom or Join.me.\* Everyone joins the call at a preset time. After a quick check-in and discussion of what each person wants to accomplish during the next 30 minutes to an hour, everyone turns off their microphone (but leaves their cameras on) and starts working. Everyone has their video on so you can easily see if someone is not doing what they said they would be working on. At the end of the preset time, everyone checks back in and says how they did.

- **Work in a location with a physically hard deadline.** Go to a coffee shop two hours before it closes and commit to having a rough draft finished before they kick you out. Park in a two-hour parking spot when you go to a co-working space and commit to having the rewrite of your business plan done before you have to move your car. Take your laptop to the library without a charging cable and commit to having a quarterly plan for blog posts in place (and outlined) before the battery dies.

Deadlines are the kryptonite that eliminates any space for distractions to thrive. Of course, eliminating any opportunity for distractions to show up works pretty well too.

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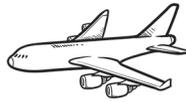
\* For more information on both platforms, please see Chapter Twelve.

#### 4. Work like you're on a plane

Every day from my home in San Diego, I see plane after plane take off from the airport, and unlike most people, I don't think "Ah, wouldn't it be great to be flying somewhere?" No, I look at those planes and think "Those lucky people up there. Think how much work they can get done in the next few hours."

When planned correctly, you can get a lot done when you're on a plane. No one can really interrupt you with a call or text you, or just pop into your office when you're up there. Unless you spring for the wi-fi, you aren't really searching the web. You can just be getting work done in stealth mode: writing, planning, reading, outlining. Overall, you have the potential to be undistracted for a large block of time.\*

While it would be awesome to be able to jump on a flight every time you wanted to avoid distractions, it's probably not feasible, so instead, take the best element of air travel—the undistracted time—set a timer and get things done (all without any of the annoying aspects of security checks, crowded planes, and fighting over the armrest).



#### Step-by-step: how to work like you're on a plane (when you're really not):

1. **Plan your "flight":** Figure out when you want to "take off" and for how long. An hour in the morning? Two hours after lunch? More? Less? Block this time out on your calendar, consider this as important as a doctor's appointment. Take some time to plan what you want to accomplish during this time. Make a detailed list of what you specifically want to accomplish. If you want, you can schedule your actions hour by hour, or half hour by half hour. .
2. **Pack your bags:** Make a list or gather what you're going to need: notebooks, laptop, charger, pens, printouts, books, journals. Pack everything up so you're ready to go.

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\* My friend, Peter Shankman, has been known to book long flights (New York to Hong Kong) so that he can get drafts of his books done. Extreme? A little. But highly effective.

3. **Set an alarm:** Set an alarm on your phone for 15 minutes before your chosen “flight” time. When the alarm goes off, grab your bag with the items from #2 and head out.
4. **Get on the “Plane”:** Go to a location where you won’t be interrupted. If you’re working in an office, this might mean shutting the office to your door with a note on it saying “Do Not Disturb” or commandeering an empty conference room. If you work at home, you could move to a different room in the house, or head to a coffee shop, a library, or a co-working space. You might even try the lobby or poolside at a local hotel or find a park with picnic tables. Really need “undisturbed airplane time?” Consider checking into a hotel.
5. **Get into “airplane mode”:** Make this time as functional as you can. Turn your phone off, or at the least (unironically), put it into airplane mode. If you’re using a laptop, turn notifications off and turn on an app like SelfControl to block distracting applications, news feeds, and games. If necessary, put in earplugs or put on noise-canceling headphones.
6. **Focus:** For the next hour (or more), focus on working without distractions. Get up every hour or so to get some water and stretch your legs, just like you would on a plane, then get back to work.
7. **Landing:** When you’ve hit your predetermined time limit, pack up your belongings, turn your phone back on, take the blocks off your browser and return to your regularly scheduled work.
8. **Plan your next “flight”:** so you can continue leveraging working without distractions.

Putting yourself and your work into “airplane mode” is a great way to overcome distraction-caused procrastination, without having to buy a ticket, deal with TSA, or overpay for bad airplane snacks.

You now have several ways to be stronger than procrastination causing distractions. You can be 10 percent less distracted by making it 20 percent harder to get distracted, or you can make your Distractions of Choice awkward. You can schedule your distractions, set up hard deadlines or work like you’re

on a plane. All of these are great plans of Action, but you still might need a solution that's a little extreme.

## 5. Go to the extreme

I once heard motivational speaker, Jack Canfield, tell a story where he said that 100 percent was easy, but 99 percent was a bitch. It's the idea that we have to go 100 percent in on something (for example, no ice cream) for it to work because 99 percent (ice cream only on the first of the month) opens up too much of a slippery slope. This can apply to distractions as well. For some people, having their Distractions of Choice under control is good enough, but for others, the only way they can be confident about not getting distracted is with 100 percent removal.

Studies have shown that completely avoiding situations where you need to rely on self-control (not eating ice cream on days other than the first of the month, or picking up your phone when you're supposed to be focusing on something else) is more effective than relying on self-control alone.<sup>8</sup> Removing yourself from any chance of temptation is always going to work better than relying on restraint. If you feel like you are helpless in the face of distractions, you can turn to these very extreme measures.

[WARNING: Use with caution! These may cause severe anxiety in some people.]

### Give someone else the power

- Have someone you REALLY trust reorganize your phone or desktop, so it's at least 20 seconds harder to find your automatic distractions mindlessly. Have them do it every three weeks, so you don't get too used to things.
- Go the Nuclear Route and make it impossible to be distracted by having someone change the passwords on your go-to distractions. Agree that you will receive the new password when you have achieved a predetermined goal. Author, James Clear, has his assistant change his social media passwords every Monday morning. On Friday afternoon, if he's gotten everything done that he wanted to for the week, she gives him the passwords so he can sign on to social media over the weekend. On Monday, the process starts all over again.<sup>9</sup>

Knowing how to be stronger than your distractions—by making them 10 percent harder to do, scheduling them, employing hard deadlines, acting like you are on a plane, or going to extremes—will always help you to be in Action. But there is one more way that you can be stronger than your distractions and that's through accountability. Accountability is such a strong way to overcome distractions, it gets its own chapter.

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## **CHAPTER THREE ACTION TOOLBOX: DISTRACTIONS**

### **DEFINITIONS IN THIS CHAPTER**

#### **Distractions of Choice**

The distractions in your life that you choose. Your devices all fall neatly into this category.

#### **Unexpected Distractions**

The distractions that show up in your life, such as coworkers popping into your office, phone calls, and unexpected problems that take time to resolve.

#### **Superior Colliculus**

A paired structure located on your optical nerve designed for reacting to visual stimuli.

### **TOOLS IN THIS CHAPTER**

Become ten percent less distracted by making it harder to be distracted. Put together ways to make it 20 seconds harder to use your cellphone, computer, television.

#### **Make it Awkward:**

Make it awkward to give in to your distractions of choice by only doing them when you ARE not comfortable. Walk around, stand in the corner, wear a motorcycle helmet, wear mittens—do whatever you need to do to make the performance of your distraction less than optimal.

#### **Schedule Your Distractions:**

Set a timer for the last five minutes of each hour and only allow yourself to give in to Distractions of Choice during this time.

**Leverage Hard Deadlines:**

Use the power of hard deadlines to get things done. If you don't have a hard deadline, then set one up. Shorten the time available to get things done.

**Work Like You're on an Airplane:**

Schedule work time as if you were taking an airplane flight. Plan on being where no one can bother you with an email, or by coming into your office. Settle into deep focus and get things done.

**Go to the Extreme:**

Give someone the power to be in charge of the things that distract you. Have them hide remotes or anything else that's a distraction, or have them decide log-in passwords, and agree not to give them to you until you've done your work.

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**ACTION ITEMS**

**Plan ahead to be less distracted:**

Think of ways you can be less distracted by your Distractions of Choice, then begin experimenting with them to control your time better.

Phone

Computer

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Other Devices

Other Distractions

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**Make your Distractions of Choice awkward:**

If your Distractions of Choice are awkward to do, you're less likely to do them. Think of three to five ways you can make your favorite distractions awkward. Choose one and try it out for the next two days. Work your way through your list. When you've experimented with all of them, choose your favorite and start using it daily.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**Schedule when you will be distracted:**

Plan when you will be distracted, then set up appropriate alarms to keep you on track.

Some examples:

*"I will allow myself to be distracted - at the end of each hour for five minutes."*

*"I will allow myself to be distracted - from 1:45 pm to 2:00 pm each day."*

*"I will allow myself to be distracted - after I've done the first five tasks on my to-do list."*

"I will allow myself to be distracted \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

"I will allow myself to be distracted \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

"I will allow myself to be distracted \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Extreme ways to stop distractions:**

Think about who you could call on to make it impossible to become distracted.  
What would they need to do for you?

Who	What
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Once you have a complete list, start asking people to help you out.

