
SHOW NOTES

EAT Your Way to Productivity and Impact - Attention

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EAT stands for **E**nergy-**A**ttention-**T**ime -- three key components of a framework that are critical for our ability to be productive and have impact in our work and personal lives.

*Check-out episode 7 to hear the discussion about ways you can enhance your energy by focusing upon: Sleep, Hydration, Exercise, and forming Habits

Today we're addressing tips regarding:

- The importance of thinking about your **attention as a precious commodity and one that is for sale**
- How to shift to **single-tasking** (vs. multi-tasking) to become more productive and impactful than you'd imagine
- Ways to **optimize your ability to focus** and pay attention

Your attention is a precious commodity – and one that is for sale!

- **Key concept:** what you focus on daily will govern what you accomplish

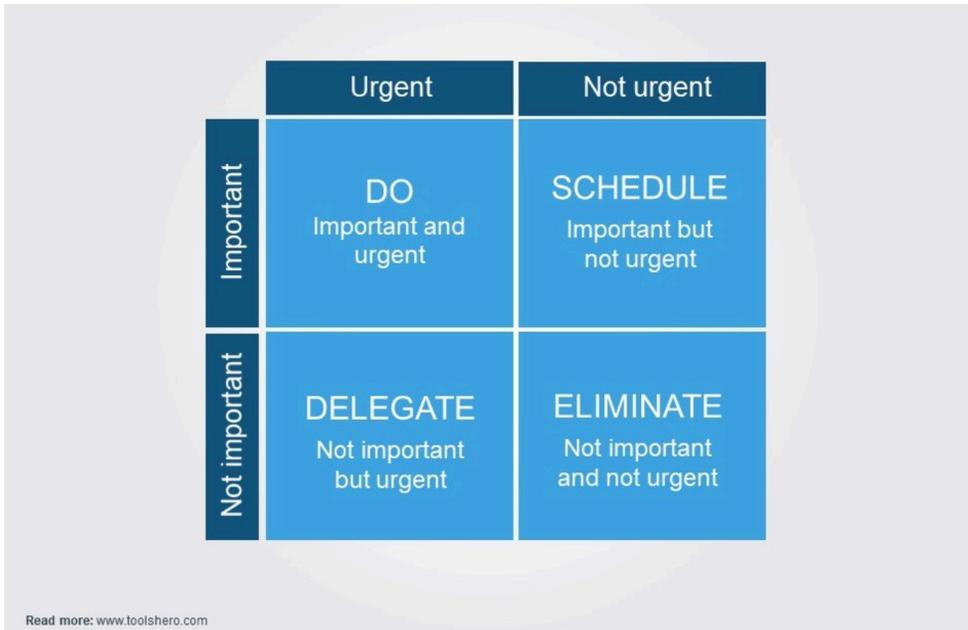
Key distinctions:

- I can be **busy** throughout the day but not make progress upon or actually accomplish any goals.
- I can be **productive** and accomplish some goals, but the possibility exists that those goals were not true priorities or, worse yet, didn't even need to get accomplished in the first place!
- If I'm **effective**, I have made progress upon or accomplished some goals that have been determined by me (or those I report to) to actually be an appropriate priority.

“Attention works much like a muscle – use it poorly and it can wither; work it well and it grows.”

Daniel Goleman,
PhD

- The *Eisenhower Matrix*
 - A way to categorize issues into 4 quadrants based upon their level of urgency and importance.
 - Check out the explanation of this matrix and how it can apply to helping you determine where to place your focus here: <https://www.eisenhower.me/eisenhower-matrix/>



- **Key concept:** Recognizing that **our attention is a commodity and that it is for sale** is critical to taking control of where your attention is focused and helps us understand how we might begin to exert some control over where we choose to focus our attention.
 - Many businesses have developed sophisticated methods to capture and sell your focus and attention that take advantage of their understanding of neurobiology.
 - **Notifications** related to the social media apps and services we utilize pull at our attention and **distract us from focusing**.
 - The intermittent and somewhat unpredictable notifications that appear on social media are impacting our brains in ways similar to playing a slot machine.
 - We get a hit of dopamine each time we hear a notification “ding”, receive a like, or see a new post or comment.

- This hit of dopamine reinforces our desire to keep connected with that social media app.
- **How to shift to *single-tasking* to become more productive and impactful**
 - Multi-tasking is shifting your attention rapidly between two or more tasks (aka “cognitive switching”)
 - Shifting your attention between each task results in performing more poorly on all involved tasks.
 - Daniel Goleman* recommends we apply “**Selective attention**” - the ability to focus on one task in spite of “sensory and emotional” distractions. (from, *Focus - The Hidden Driver of Excellence*).
 - *Daniel Goleman is the science journalist and two-time Pulitzer Prize nominee who wrote The New York Times bestseller, *Emotional Intelligence*
 - As we become more skilled at focusing our attention, we can at times achieve a state of "Flow"
 - “Flow”: feeling “in the zone”; resulting from immersion in an activity you find rewarding, inspiring, stimulating or intellectually challenging.
 - *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, PhD

Ways to optimize your ability to focus and pay attention

- Learn about and apply the **Getting Things Done** or “GTD” methodology
 - *Getting Things Done - The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*, by David Allen
 - 8-minute overview video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLjgUYm2wpk>
 - A project is anything that takes more than one step to complete.
 - Recognize that we don’t “do” a project. We do tasks that ultimately result in the completion of a project.
 - Begin with **capturing** things you can think of that you have to do.

- Do this by performing a weekly “**brain dump**” - writing down everything you’re holding in your mind about the different things you have to do (e.g., schedule a dentist visit to clean out the garage to develop the curriculum for a course).
- Capture things in a **trusted system** to limit where you have to look to find things (e.g., Evernote, OneNote, others).
 - Having a trusted system allows you to devote less attention to keeping track of things and locating things when you need them.
- Next is to **process** the information you’ve captured
 - Is it something that takes more than one step to complete? Then it’s a project to put on your **project list**.
 - Determine if what you’ve captured is a single action task. If it is, put it on a **single-action list**.
 - Determine what the outcome is related to the task and if it’s part of a larger project.
 - By determining what the outcome is, you can then decide what your **Next Action** is related to the task or project.
 - The next action is **what you can actually physically do** (e.g., search for the phone number for the brake shop if your project is to “get the brakes on my car fixed”).
 - If it takes one step to complete and if it requires 2 minutes or less of your time, do it now and be done with it.
 - If not, **schedule it** to be done on a **specific day and time** on your calendar or move it to a “**someday/maybe list**”.
- The final step is to **review** your lists in your system on a regular basis, typically weekly.
 - The **weekly review** is one of the **most powerful productivity methods** you can apply.

- It allows you to identify what you still need to accomplish, re-prioritize existing tasks, feel good about what you've accomplished and celebrate small wins, and revise your list of projects, tasks, and next actions.
 - Set aside 30-60 minutes at the end of the week to conduct a weekly review.

Tips to hack your mind and improve your ability to focus

- Apply a simple timer (*Pomodoro timer*) to shrink the challenge of committing to focus for a period of time and help build your ability to focus your attention.
 - Set the timer for 25 minutes and, once it goes off, take a small break (typically up to 5 minutes) to move your body and shift your attention before getting back into the next period of attention.
 - <https://tomato-timer.com/>
- Begin to practice **mindfulness meditation**
 - This will allow your mind to practice focusing on one thing, often the act of taking a breath in and out and allowing your mind to focus your attention on your breath.
 - When you try to pay attention to the act of breathing, you'll notice your mind thinking (remember, that's its job!) and you'll notice your thoughts are pulling your attention away from a focus on your breath.
 - In those moments, just notice that you're having a thought and then redirect your attention to the fact that you're taking a breath in or out.
 - Meditation focuses on your inner state and develops your capacity to observe yourself in the moment without judgment.
 - There are several apps to help you with a meditation practice (e.g., Calm, Headspace, Meditation Studio, others).
 - There's also an interesting approach to learning how to focus your attention during meditation that involves a raisin (<https://mbsrtraining.com/mindfully-eating-a-raisin-exercise-2/>)

- **Eliminate clutter in your physical environment**
 - Clutter pulls at your attention.
 - An initial part of your GTD approach to decrease stress is to take everything that's pulling at your attention and organize it, making a plan to address it, including clutter.
 - The next time that you look at clutter, you've got the project related to it **captured** in your **trusted system** and you've identified **when** you're going to take your **next action** on it.

- **Eliminate threats to your attention from your technology**
 - Adopt the mindset of being in control of the technology you use.
 - Notifications come at you intentionally from our numerous electronic gadgets.
 - Notifications disrupt your attention and makes re-engaging your focus and attention challenging.
 - **Re-engaging your attention** with a task once your focus has been shifted away has been studied and found to take, **on average, 23 minutes!**
 - <https://www.ics.uci.edu/~gmark/chi08-mark.pdf>

- **Tip:** Open your **smartphone's** notifications preferences section and **turn off notifications** on your numerous apps – you take control of when you look at things!

- **Tip:** Open your **email program** on your computer, go into the preferences section and turn off the following:
 - the email pop-up window that appears each time you get a new message
 - the email number badge that appears on the icon for your email program so your not seeing that on the screen
 - the notification noise/sound that is played each time you get a new email

Key Take-Aways and Action Steps

- Your attention is a precious commodity and it is for sale! What you focus on daily will govern what you accomplish.
- Understand how to categorize your tasks into categories based upon their levels of urgency and importance by using an Eisenhower Matrix.
- Learn more about the Getting Things Done (GTD) methodology and begin to apply it in your personal and professional life beginning with:
 - Collecting the information you have in your head and around you
 - Processing that information into the various projects and tasks that you have going on and deciding what the Next Action is related to any given task
 - Reviewing what you have accomplished, what you still need to accomplish and re-prioritizing your tasks so that you identify the Next Actions that need to happen in the upcoming week
- Implement some techniques that will help you strengthen your ability to focus your attention, such as:
 - Using a Pomodoro timer to help focus your attention for specific periods of time, followed by a small break
 - Developing a mindfulness meditation practice to help you focus your attention and get better at limiting interruptions in your attention from the numerous thoughts and other distractions coming at us when we're trying to focus
 - Organize and de-clutter your physical space
 - Take control over the numerous notifications that pull at your attention from your smartphone and computer, so you choose where the focus of your attention goes while you're working or interacting with someone.

Resources:

- Eisenhower Matrix: <https://www.eisenhower.me/eisenhower-matrix/>
- *Focus - The Hidden Driver of Excellence*, by Daniel Goleman, PhD

- <https://www.amazon.com/Focus-Hidden-Excellence-Daniel-Goleman/dp/0062114964/>
- *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, PhD
 - <https://www.amazon.ae/Flow-Psychology-Mihaly-Csikszentmihalyi-PhD/dp/0061339202>
- *Getting Things Done - The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*, by David Allen
 - <https://www.amazon.com/Getting-Things-Done-Stress-Free-Productivity-ebook/dp/B00KWG9M2E>
- * Getting Things Done video summary
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLjgUYm2wpk>
- Mindfulness Meditation with a Raisin: <https://mbsrtraining.com/mindfully-eating-a-raisin-exercise-2/>
- Pomodoro timer online: <https://tomato-timer.com/>