

How To Create Focus

Toolbox Teleclass Transcription

By Debra Russell



Professional Program

**Track 3: Nuts & Bolts: The Fundamentals of
Business**



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the December 2011 Toolbox Teleclass. We're going to look at How to Create Focus in today's class. Has anyone called in since I turned on the recording?

Caller: Jennifer.

Debra: Oh hey, Jen! Great. You can go ahead and hit star 6 to mute yourself, and I will periodically open it back up for questions.

WHAT IS FOCUS?

Okay, so what is Focus? You know, I think a lot of us have a concept of what focus means, and it's generally the ability to choose your attention, to put your intention into your attention at will, right?

So it's the ability to say, "Okay, I'm going to read this book now," and read it and not pay attention to other things around you. I went online and searched for a dictionary definition, and I found two that I think are interesting.

CENTRAL POINT OF ATTENTION

POINT AT WHICH RAYS OF LIGHT OR OTHER RADIATION CONVERGE

The first one is the point at which rays of light or other radiation converge. So if you want to translate that into our electric impulses in our nerves, it's the point at which our attention converges.

And the other definition is the central point of attention. What I find challenging for most people is twofold. One they are unable to hold their focus on a single thing, and/or the other, which is that they feel guilty about holding focus on one thing, because there's so many other things that they have to pay attention to.

And feeling somehow obligated that if, you know, they get an email or a text message or a telephone call or whatever, you know, a TV show or the honking outside, doesn't even really matter too much, but there's this kind of obligation that pay attention to whatever that thing is.

And there have been quite a few studies on this phenomenon, and in particular, on the idea, which was very popular back in the 90's, that we could increase our productivity by focusing on multiple things at once.

And that idea has become debunked over and over and over again by multiple studies done at multiple psychology institutes and universities. I'm just going to talk about three of them, because I think this is really interesting.



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METRICS ON MULTI-TASKING

2005 INSTITUTE OF PSYCHIATRY AT UNIV OF LONDON - WORKERS DISTRACTED BY E-MAIL AND PHONE CALLS SUFFER A FALL IN IQ MORE THAN TWICE THAT FOUND IN MARIJUANA SMOKERS

2001 - AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION'S JOURNAL OF EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY – UNIV OF MICH STUDY SUBJECTS LOST TIME WHEN THEY HAD TO SWITCH FROM ONE TASK TO ANOTHER

In 2001, the American Psychology Association's Journal of Experimental Psychology published a University of Michigan study, and what they found when looking at students who were multi-tasking was that they lost time when they had to switch from one task to another.

So, for example, if they were reading an article and then went to read an email, it took them more time to do the transition to the email and back to the article, then it would have taken them aggregate had they just read the article and then read the email.

So the transition takes time. In 2005, the Institute of Psychiatry at the University of London did studies on productivity among workers, and they found that workers distracted by email and phone calls suffer a fall in IQ more than twice that found in marijuana smokers.

This is really interesting, and like hmmm.... So it's like you're on drugs every time you allow yourself to be distracted. Your IQ level drops, and I think for our purposes, I believe that your creativity is harmed by this.

Your ability--because creativity is more than a tension, and it's an actual leap. It's the mind making the leap. And I think that that takes a tremendous amount of energy. And if you are multi-tasking, even when you're not saying, "Okay, right now I'm going sit down and focus on creativity."

Even when you are not multitasking during that period, if you're multitasking throughout your day otherwise, I actually think it decreases the amount of energy you have available to you to focus when you're creating.

You know, if you think of your brain as a battery only holding so much charge. You're using up a tremendous amount of charge if you're multi-tasking. and that means that that much less energy is available to you when you sit down to create.



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2009 – STANFORD STUDY FOUND PPL WHO MULTITASK HEAVILY BECOME “SUCKERS FOR IRRELEVANCY”, EVERYTHING DISTRACTS THEM.

So the last study I'm going to mention is a Stanford study found that people who multi-tasked heavily actually become less able to focus when they want to focus. And the terms they used, which I thought were interesting, were that they become “suckers for irrelevancy.”

Everything and anything distracts them. So if you're spending large chunks of time multi-tasking. Doing email while you're doing Twitter and Facebook while you're watching TV and listening to music, and you know, I don't know... cleaning your kitchen.

That the more you do that the less you're able to focus. So I actually also think for people who do a lot of multi-tasking, it's like an addiction, and it will take time once you quit to rebuild the ability to focus.

Just like when you quit smoking, it takes time for your lungs to heal themselves and for you to be able to, you know, run or exercise or go up and down stairs without getting out of breath. I think that if you quit multi-tasking, it takes time for your ability to stay focused with any kind of consistency. It's like you have to rebuild those skills.

OVERWHELM IS CAUSED BY FOCUSING TOO BROAD, NARROW YOUR FOCUS TO REDUCE YOUR STRESS – AND REDUCING YOUR STRESS WILL FACILITATE YOUR FOCUS

The other issue I think that comes up for people a lot around focusing is overwhelm. And it is a—overwhelm, I think, causes people in an effort to appease that emotion of overwhelm, it very often causes people to multitask, because then they have this illusion that they're getting more done.

But really you're not getting more done, and you know that on some level, which is only going to increase the overwhelm. But actually overwhelm is cause-- the emotion of overwhelm is caused by focusing too broad. By thinking about too many things at once.

And the best way to reduce your overwhelm is to narrow your focus, and the more you narrow your focus, the more you will reduce your stress, and of course, reducing stress will facilitate your focus, so it does feed on itself.

TOP 3 FOCUS STEELERS

So let's talk about--so that was the introduction. Let's talk about-- I promised you the top 3 focus stealers, and then we're going to talk about some options for, some alternatives for dealing with those focus stealers. And as well as some additional focusing issues.



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BOUNDARY ISSUES

So the top 3 focus stealers: The first one I believe, and these are no particular order. The first one is boundary issues. By boundary issues what I mean have to do with both physical, emotional, and kind of psychological boundaries. Relational boundaries.

PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

Within the physical boundaries, very often, the thing that gets in our way is clutter. And not having locations that are really assign for activities. So for example, if your office is in your kitchen or your practice room is also your spare bedroom, is also your sewing room, is also the junk collecting room or the closet overflow room.

So one of the best recommendations I can give to you is that you assign locations by activity. So when you're sitting at your office, you're only doing office things, and if you're going to be creating art that you do that in a different location.

If you're going to be, you know, managing household things that you separate that from managing business things. The other alternative if you don't have a lot of physical space, which a lot of people don't, is having a process for setting up and breaking down the project.

And we're going to talk about that a bit more in the third focus stealer, so I'm going to hold off on that one a little bit.

PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

Personal boundaries have to do with managing other people's demands and other people's expectations. I remember when I first started working for myself. I would get phone calls from friends saying things like, "Oh well, you're not working. Can you pick me up at the airport?"

Or "Yeah, you're not working. Let's go do something. Let's go do this or let's go do that." I know that parents with children very often deal with that in that, you know, as far as their kids are concerned their first and only job really is to be their parent.

And that's true to some degree, but particularly if a child under the age of 5. I would say, under the age of 4 or 5. Once a child is above the age of 5, teaching them boundaries and managing their expectations, I think, is not only good for you as parents, it's also good for them, because they learn to recognize boundaries, and they begin to learn to set them themselves, because children learn from watching what we do not listening to what we say.



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So the more assertive you are in setting boundaries and setting expectations, I think the better model you are for your children. And the more sane you will stay and the more focused time and attention you can give them when it's their turn.

So if you set a boundary and say, you know, mommy is working from 2-4, but from 4 o'clock to 5 o'clock it's your time to play. And I'm happy to do anything you want to do between 4 o'clock and 5 o'clock. That's your time.

If on the other hand, you're trying to work and give them attention, you're back into that multi-tasking trap, and your quality of attention to them isn't very high, and guess what? They know it.

And I think you will find that their stress level reduces when you give them clear focused time and are not scattered during that time, and they will be much more willing to honor the boundary if they feel like when it's their turn, it's really their turn.

So setting personal boundaries is, I think, really, critically important, just as human beings. You know, to say this is the time to that I've set aside to do acts, and I'm going to honor our relationship by setting a different time aside to spend with you. But I need you to honor our relationship by honoring this boundary.

TIME BOUNDARIES

The other area around boundary issues are your time boundaries, and that gets into setting up your time structures, which I cover in a lot more detail with the [Time Management](#) and [Project Management](#) classes, so I'm not going to duplicate that materials here.

I'm just going to recommend that you go listen to that classes, and that you use the *Time Management from the Inside Out* and frankly the *Organizing From the Inside Out* book also is good for the physical boundaries that we've talked about.

To set up a schedule whereby you are creating clear focus. So you know, your time is set up by category. So from 2-4 you're working on marketing and from you know 3-5 you're working on finances or whatever it is, so that that time boundary set up, and then you need to practice actually honoring that time boundary.

And saying, "No really, this is the time that I'm doing that." And email get answered, you know, at 9am, at 12 noon, and at 5pm. I spend 3 minutes on email or whatever it is and not allow yourself to get pulled away. So creating up clear boundaries in your time structure.



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CONFLICTING AND/OR UNCLEAR PRIORITIES

So the second focus stealer is conflicting and/or unclear priorities. So if you haven't set up a time schedule where you're--how you're spending your time during this chunk of time isn't clearly laid out, but also if you have a lot of piled up to dos within a particular category that have no clear priorities set up.

MANAGING CONFLICTING PRIORITIES CLASS AND ARTICLE

Be a serial monogamist!

There is a class called [Managing Conflicting Priorities](#), and there's also an article that deal with that. So again, I'm not going to duplicate the content here, but what I want to recommend is that you consider yourself a serial monogamous when it comes to projects.

WHEN YOUR BRAIN INTERRUPTS YOU WITH THINGS YOU'VE FORGOTTEN – MAKE A NOTE/SCHEDULE IT IN AN APPROPRIATE PLACE AND THEN LET IT GO FOR NOW.

And when it comes to your time structure. So you really only focusing on one thing at a time. The challenge with that is what happens when your brain interrupts you with all the things it doesn't want you to forget?

Oh you know, "What about this and what about that. Don't forget this and don't forget that and did you call so and so?" See? And I talked about this a bit in the [Transforming Your Inner Critic into Your Staunchest Ally](#), because very often that voice feels critical.

It seems like its criticizing or nagging or, you know, but really all its doing is not trusting your structure. If your brain doesn't trust that you will remember to do those things. It's going to keep reminding you until you do those things, because it doesn't trust you.

Because you'll forget. Because you've forgotten in the past. So the best way to solve that issue is to set up really good structures. So, what that might look like is having a time map or a time schedule where you approach particular categories of activities within set up time structures, and having some kind of a to do list management system that classify your to do items by category and even better by priority within those categories.

So that they have, you know, dates associated with them, priority level, like urgency levels, associated with them. Using the project management systems as the PRDs, the performance results descriptions, so that all of your activities are also connected to goals, and you can even say, you know, in this chunk of time I'm not only working on marketing, but I'm working on this particular goal within marketing.

The more decisive you are around those things to begin with, the easier it will be to focus on just that one thing, because that what you're focusing on. But also, when your



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mind pops those other things in up, you can take a moment and just go into that task management system and make sure it's in there and make sure it's scheduled.

And then set it in your brain, "Yup, it's taken care of you don't need to remind me about that again. I've got reminders set up." And the more you do that and really use those structures effectively, the more your brain is going to trust that you've got this stuff handled and the less it's going to feel like it has to interrupt you.

You know, it going to trust that you got stuff handled and it doesn't have to keep remembering stuff. And the other nice thing about that the more your brain can relax around remembering this stuff, because you've got those structure set up. The more processing power you'll have available to focus on the thing that you're focusing on in this moment.

So you'll have--you'll find yourself being more creative, being more effective and productive, having more fun, having less stress, having more energy, because remembering all that stuff takes a tremendous amount of energy, right?

And remember what I said about, you know, when you get distracted that it takes time and it takes energy.

TRANSITION ISSUES

So the third focus stealer in my experience are transition issues. And I'm going to talk about that in a lot more detail a little bit further on in the class, but let me just define this.

It takes time for you to transition from one activity to the next. It may take time to set up, to break down from the activity that you're breaking down in order to put stuff away and come to a place of completion.

And make note of where you're completing and set it aside, so that you can cleanly and clearly set it aside and be complete with that thing for now. I find one of the problems with transition is very often that we just stop what we're doing with no clear process for remembering where we stopped in order to pick up easily and effectively the next time we pick up that project.

So if you can find a way to make a note of where you left off or create a system, if it's a recurring activity, create a checklist system, so you've checked off where you left off or even if, you know, when you're going to be doing working on that project next going into that date in your--date appointment. in your to do list--not to do, in your time map or calendar and saying, "Pick up at-----" and you know, "file has been--is stored here," and "I'm on step 4."



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You know, so that when it's time to sit down and pick it back up, it's really easy and obvious how to pick it up. I think doing that at the end of working on a project also reassures yourself that you'll be able to easily and effortlessly pick that process back up where you left it.

So that you can then really set the project aside. Setting it aside, cleaning up after it, looking at what the next project is, setting up the next project, that's the obvious transition process. And how long that's going to take is going to depend on what the process, what's going on, but there's also an emotional component to that.

Because you have to change gears psychologically. You have to change gears in your head very often and that takes time as well. So what I'm talking about transition issues I'm really talking about what it takes for you to stop one thing and start another.

And having laid all of these out, I hope you'll beginning to see why multi-tasking doesn't work, because you're having to do that transition multiple times. And it's just not effective. So those are the 3 focus stealers: boundary issues, conflicting and/or unclear priorities, and transition issues. That's the 3 focus stealers.

HOW TO SET CLEAR INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FOCUS

BOUNDARIES

So let's talk about how to set internal and external focus boundaries. We talked a little bit about physical space.

PHYSICAL SPACE

Setting up project areas is great if you got the space to do it or setting up a place for packing up your project and putting it a way, that makes it easy and effortless to find it the next time you're going to work on that project.

CLEAR TIME STRUCTURES

Creating a clean, clear work space that you can clear after you finish working on one project and before you open up the next, okay? And really out using the physical space to help you in the transition.

But there are also some things that you can do. So for example, if you have no choice but to work to set up your little office space in your kitchen or in your dining room, and you have no--you know, there just really isn't any other place to put it.



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You can set up some physical energetic boundaries that still delineates the space. For example, you could set up a bookcase that physically divides the space. You can hang a curtain from the ceiling.

Very often, having something green in that divider, a plant or two in that divider can be really helpful or having some kind of a lighting element that specifically lights your area, your work area.

And so when you walk into your work area, you turn the lights on the work area, and so the light begins to create a bit of a boundary on that. So those are just some ideas for physical boundaries.

If you're sharing work space with another person, I strongly recommend that you not share the same desk if at all possible. Even if you're using the same computer that you have separate displays to use. So that you're sitting at your desk, you can--you still boot up the same computer, but you can look at your display, rather than having to share a physical desk, so that you can really make that space yours.

And so if the other person isn't as organized as you are or organizes differently, then you feel comfortable. You can really set it up so that it works for you organically.

So that's kind of my suggestions around physical space. I recommend that the more organized your physical space is, the more focused you'll be, and the more cluttered and messy your space is the harder it is to focus.

So if you find yourself not being able to focus and you notice that your space is messy, just stop what you're doing and straighten up your mess. Just get it organized visually as much as possible, even if it means taking a bunch of stuff and putting it in a box and closing the box and setting it aside. So that it is clearly clear.

In setting up the time structures, one of the biggest thing--I've talked about that I have classes on [Time Management](#), [Project Management](#). There's a whole section, in fact, if you look at the Foundation class page, you'll see a whole section devoted to time and project management and all of those classes are going to be valuable to you.

CHOOSE AN APPROPRIATE TIME FOR YOU TO DO THIS ACTIVITY

But one of the most important things around this though is to choose the right time for a particular activity. And there is no one right time that's true for everybody. Everybody's kind of biorhythms are different, so what you need to discover is what is the right time for you to be doing that activity and honor that.

If you're trying to get to an activity at a particular time of the day and every time you sit down to do it you just don't want to do it, then try doing it at a different time. It just may



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not be the right time for you. You know, if you're trying to be creative in the middle of the afternoon when really all you want is to take a nap, then that's probably not the time for you to be creative.

Probably a better time to do something physical. Maybe doing something like filing or cleaning or organizing that uses-- that's a bit more physically active. Uses a different part of the brain.

So you just need to experiment a bit with that and find out what's going to work for you, because everybody is different and there are not right or wrong answers for this. You just need to identify what works for you.

TRANSITIONS

In the boundaries, the boundaries need to include transitions. So in other words when you're scheduling yourself, you need to also schedule transition time. You need to figure out how long it really takes you to transition from one kind of activity to another kind of activity, and then build that into your time structure.

You may find that it's easier for you to transition from one of kind of activity to another kind of activity. So you might want to bundle those activities together. If you find it's really hard to transition from business activities to creative activities, not unusual for most people, well, then maybe you divide by days or sections of the days for when you're doing business activities and creative activities.

Maybe you divide them with a meal break or some other kind of a break, so that the transition is more organic. So in setting up your physical and psychological and time boundaries, take transitions into account.

One of the biggest mistake I see people making in scheduling is not building driving time to go from one thing to another or packing up time to go from one thing to another. So for example, if you need--you're going to go to a gig, you need to set some time in which to pack your gig bag or to make sure that everything you need is in that bag before going to the gig, and you need to build that into your time structure, Because that's also a transitional activity. Getting together what you're going to need to do the next thing, and then also the driving time or the getting dressed or putting the makeup on time. Whatever it is for you. Those are really transition things, and very often, we underestimate how long it takes us to transition from one thing to another.

And/or we make ourselves wrong for it taking however long it takes for us to transition. And you know what? It takes you as long as it takes you. There is no right or wrong, good or bad here.



The more you resist it and make yourself wrong for it taking as long as it takes you, the longer it will take you. So you know, just build it into your schedule that way. I want to talk a bit more about the transition process, because I do think that this is a huge piece that people don't pay attention to and that damages our ability to focus.

TRANSITION PROCESSES

LEARN YOUR TRANSITION NEEDS

You need to learn what your transition needs are.

OFTEN ACTIVITY DEPENDENT

Very often they're activity dependent. I have one client who is working a full-time job that she loves, but that took her a lot of energy and focus.

And then she would come home from that job and work on her music. Whether it's booking gigs or writing songs or recording or practicing or whatever it was. She was working on her music in the evenings or on the weekends, after putting in a full 40-hour week.

And so she would come in--she didn't have that far of a commute, so maybe she would drive 20 minutes home from work, but then she would find it really hard to kind of shift into being creative. She just felt really tired.

So one of the things we did and she found that work really well for her was that she started her day over. So in the morning she liked to get up, do some physical activity, have some food and shower, and then go to work.

And so what we had her do is when she came home from work, she would do some physical activity, either take a walk or do some yoga or some stretching. Some physical activity, then have some food, and then take a shower.

And she found that because that was her trigger for starting her day, it was like she was starting her day over again, and she found that she was able to be a lot more effective when she sat down to work on her music. Because she'd kind of program a new day. So finding something that is going to help you clear the last project so that you can work on the next project. Whatever that means for you.

CREATE TIME TO CLEAR THE PHYSICAL SPACE BETWEEN PROJECTS

Organization issues

I talked a bit about this already. Creating time to clear the physical space between projects. We talked about organizational issues, but like I said the better you are able to



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kind of pack up one project and put it away in a way that it'll be really easy to restart it again the next time.

I think the easier it will be for you to transition both out of that project into the next project, but also back into that project the next time its time. So you want kind of fill-- you want to kind of create containers for your projects.

BUILD A TIME BUFFER INTO YOUR STRUCTURES

You want to build some time buffer into your structures, because here's the bottom line, you're going to take that time anyway. So you might as well build it into your process.

YOU WILL TAKE IT ANYWAY – SO BUILD IT INTO YOUR PROCESS

You're going to --you're going to end up, even if you try to sit right down and get to work, you're going to end up not being able to get right into work. You're going to end up getting distracted by email or let me just play a computer games or wait, I forgot to do this or that.

You're going to take it anyway, so give it to yourself, and give it to yourself in a conscious and intentional way, and really say to yourself, "Okay, I'm done with that project. I'm going to clear my mind by doing XYZ. whatever it is. So that I can be clear to start the next project."

WHAT CLEARS YOUR MIND?

So if you are really clear about your intention and take it guilt free, okay? And I already talked a little bit about what, you know, figuring out what clears your mind. I find sometimes the best thing that I can do to clear my mind is to do a brain dump of all the steps that, you know, modeling around in it. So I'll open up my task management system.

I'm actually--I've started a new system. I'm starting to work with Toodledo on a client's recommendation actually, so I'm experimenting with that. So I can open up that up, and I'll just do a brain dump.

What I find very often when I go to do that brain dump, a lot of those activities that my brain is rattling with are already in there. And so I can kind of say to those thoughts, "You know what? It's good. That stuff is handled and taken care of. You can trust me. I'm working on it," and that can be really helpful.

SHOWER

EXERCISE



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MEDITATION

You could take a shower. You could exercise. You could meditate. You could look back on the process that you just completed and feel grateful and give yourself credit for what you accomplished. Even if you didn't complete the project.

Really let yourself take credit. "Well boy, I did this, this, and this. That was good." Or you know, "I was able to reach this person. That feels really good." And even if you're marketing and get three "no's". You got No's, you got answers. You could cross those people off your list.

So you still accomplished something. So that might be something that might help make that transition. Really give yourself credit for what you accomplished. There's a process that I do at the top of each coaching session with my private clients.

CLEARING THE SPACE PROCESS

That I believe I've gone over in other classes, but I'm going to go over here because it's about--it's called clearing the space. It's about eliminating all the other stuff, so that you can focus. That's the purpose of the process.

And so let me teach it to you. I'm going to give you the steps, and then I'll give you a couple of examples of how to do it, but feel free to use it as part of your transition period. So the steps are first to name the thing that's going on in the background.

So basically what you are doing is you are clearing the space of all of the stuff that's cluttering your mind. All of the things you are worrying about, thinking about, whatever. Whatever comes up for you.

But you don't want to start thinking in depth about that thing, because that's counter-productive. Just give it a name. So "fight I had with my boyfriend" or "project that's due tomorrow" or you know, the "pain in the back of my neck" or "worry about my father" or whatever it is. Fighting off a cold is one that I'm dealing with right now in this moment.

You name the thing that's going on in a brief sentence, then you name the emotions that are connected to it. So the first step is naming the thing. The second step is naming the emotions that are connected to it.

You want to just name the emotions and not explain them. So you're not anxious because, you know, you don't know what's going to happen if you don't this blah...blah...blah...blah. Because the more you think about it again, then the more you bring it up. You just name the emotion: anxiousness, excitement, anticipation, dread, frustrations, annoyance, impatient, whatever it is, okay?



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So you name the thing. You name the emotion connected to it. Then you state your intention, which is that you are setting those emotions aside so that you can focus on the project that you're sitting down to do.

The words I use are, "I am setting aside the anxiety so can I focus on this next project." I don't care if you use those words. You just want to be powerful and in the present tense. Then take a moment and really set it aside.

You can set it aside just --- with a breath and letting it go or you can use a visualization technique of taking the emotions and putting them in a box... an imaginary box, enclosed in a box.

Putting them in a drawer, closing the drawer. Putting them in a closet, closing the closet. Just setting them aside. The same concept that I talked about earlier where you clear the stuff off your desk, even if it just putting all that stuff in a box and closing the box. Just get it out of sight.

Here's the thing; this is not about fixing anything. It's not about solving anything, it's not about handling anything. It's about honoring the emotions connected to that thing and setting them aside.

So let me give you an example. What's going on in the background is that I am fighting a cold. The emotions associated with that are frustration, dread, impatience, and determination. So I am setting aside frustration, dread, impatience, and determination, so that I can focus on this class that I am teaching right now.

Okay? So you saw that I stated it. I stated the emotions connected to it. I stated my intention, and I gave myself a moment to really set it aside. Okay? So that's basically what the process is.

Okay, I want to take a moment to open it up for questions. Is there any questions? You can go ahead and take yourself off mute, star 6. I'll give you a moment to do that.

PROCRASTINATION

Okay, so I want to talk a bit about procrastination, because people equate a lack of -- procrastination with a lack of focus. But procrastination--let's define procrastination as the unwillingness or inability to this thing that you know you should.

Or even to do this thing that you know you want to do, the inability or unwillingness to do that thing, and you may find yourself doing other things instead. You may find yourself doing nothing instead.



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And the thing that you do instead maybe actually productive in their own way, so you know you should be making marketing calls, but you clean your kitchen instead or you should be cleaning your kitchen, and you play computer games instead or you worked on email instead.

IT'S A SYMPTOM NOT A CAUSE

So there's this thing that you know you should be doing or you want to be doing, but you feel unable or unwilling to get down to doing it. First thing I want to say about procrastination is that it's a symptom, not a cause.

I think it's a much bigger subject, and I am probably going to be doing a class on it in soon, but I've been meaning to do that for a while, but I've been procrastinating about it. (Kidding!)

So I will be doing a class specifically on procrastination so look out for that. So I'm not going into a lot of details here. But just know that it is a symptom not a cause. You're not doing this thing, not because you're procrastinating.

You're not doing that thing because you're afraid to do it. You're not sure how to do it. You have so many conflicting priorities you don't know what to do first. You know, there are lot of things that cause procrastination, and the bottom line is that the only way to stop procrastinating is to figure out why you're procrastinating and solve that problem.

IF YOU'RE FEELING STUCK, USE THE FOCUSING PROCESS TO IDENTIFY WHAT THE ISSUE IS.
If you're feeling stuck you can use the focusing process to identify what the issue is. Now the focusing process what I'm talking about with focusing is different than when I'm talking about what's focus.

I know it's confusing, the terminology, but focusing is an actual psychological process. I know I've taught it in couple of different classes. It's the process whereby you go into yourself and have a conversation with your physical sensation.

Very often, if you're stuck you can use the process of focusing to find out what it is you're stuck about, why you're stuck. I very often find that the reason we procrastinate about a project is because we haven't chunked the project down small enough, so we kind of don't know where we need to start.

So if you chunk that project down into pieces, so if you say I'm going to work on that project now and the first thing I'm going to do is figure out what all the pieces are of that project, and just write them down and put them in some kind of logical order and say, "Okay, today I'm just doing this one little piece."



FOCUSING

I think you'll find it easier to move forward, because again, overwhelm is caused by focusing too broad. So if you chunk it down to smaller pieces, to baby steps, you'll be able to move forward.

So procrastination like I said, sometimes procrastination is caused by issues around what you believe about the project. Like you think it's going to be hard or you think it's going to be painful in some way.

So if you shift your belief about it that will help you move forward. But if you find yourself trying to do something and you find yourself unable to focus on it, the problem probably isn't around focusing itself, but around what you're thinking, believing or expecting in that project.

And so you want to address that. And that, you know, once you figure out what the issue is and find some solutions for it, I think you'll find it really easy to just focus. The challenge with focus is

ADDITIONAL FOCUSING ISSUES

In that case is very often again just a symptom of another issue. But here's the biggest thing and this is what I want--well actually, you know I'm going to back up on that. There's a couple of additional focusing issues that I think come up for people.

BURNOUT AND FATIGUE

There's burnout and fatigue. Very often we have trouble focusing because we're just not getting enough sleep. We're not getting enough rest. We are overworking ourselves. And then wonder why we can't work even more harder.

So sometimes the best answer is to take a nap or take a break or take a rest. And you'll find that when you sit back down, you'll better be able to focus. There have been a ton of studies about sleep deprivation and how much it impacts a body's ability to focus on a task.

And they actually equated this to drug or alcohol use. So if you are having trouble focusing, ask yourself. "Well, did I get enough sleep last night?" or "How long has it been since I've gotten enough sleep?"

And really you know, take good care of yourself, because forcing yourself to focus more is only going to deepen the problem until you make yourself ill.



RESISTANCE AND RESENTMENT

There's also very often, and I talk about this in the [Business Management For the Creative Mind](#) class is one of the biggest obstacles people that comes up against, which is resistance and resentment.

And going back to what I was saying around procrastination that very often it's a belief that's in the way of doing an activity. If you're looking at that activity with resistance or resentment, you're going to find it really hard to focus on that project.

If you're like, "God, why do I have to market? I hate marketing" or "Why do I have to do my finances? Man, I just you know, I just so resist doing my finances." Not clearing up whatever those emotions are about, because resistance and resentment are emotions; therefore, they're caused by thoughts or beliefs.

So if you identify what the thoughts or beliefs you have about that project that are creating resistance and resentment in you, you're going to be much better able to focus on the project.

Trying to just push through the emotions without dealing with whatever the issue is doesn't work. It's almost like you're multitasking, because part of your brain is still going to be hung up in those emotions.

So you're going to find it like Sisyphus pushing the rock up the hill. You just have to keep pushing the rock up the hill, and that rock is called resistance. It's called resentment.

And so if you don't deal with that rock, you're not going to really get a lot of productivity out of yourself.

STRETCH REFLEX

And the last thing I want to talk about these additional focusing issue is something that I called a stretch reflex. I find this a lot with clients where they've push themselves out of their comfort zone around something.

Whether it's getting themselves out there in their marketing effort or taking on a project that they were nervous about doing or challenging themselves in the area of growth or learning, that when you stretch yourself there's something in your body when you stretch your body. So like if you go in and you're stretching out your hamstring, you get to a certain point in the stretch where your muscles will contract.

It will contract against the stretch. And it's a self-protective measure, because the muscles doesn't want to be torn. So if when you're stretching you get to that stretch reflex moment. Rather than trying to stretch any further, you just hold it and breathe.



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And don't lessen the stretch. Don't react to the reflex. Just hold the stretch right there and breathe. You'll find that after a few minutes the muscle will relax, and you can actually go deeper into the stretch.

Or I think that's true when we're stretching ourselves out of our comfort zone. If you've been stretching yourself out of your comfort zone a lot, and then you find yourself being challenged to focus in that area, what I would recommend you do is to just stay at the level you're at for a little bit and breath.

Give yourself credit, look at all that you've accomplished. Allow yourself to really be in that level of accomplishment for a little bit and breath before you try to stretch further.

I think you'll find if you really give yourself credit for how much you've stretched, for how much you've accomplished, and really allow yourself to revel in it a little bit. You're going to be able to go deeper, and go further and focus more.

STOP BEATING YOURSELF UP ABOUT IT!

But if all you'll ever doing is saying it's not enough, it's not enough, it's not enough then inside you've got a little child that's stamping your foot and say, "It is enough! Why isn't it never enough? Why am I never good enough for you?"

So if you can in that moment just say, "Yes, you are good enough. You're so good. Look at all the things that you've accomplished. Look at all the ways that you surprised yourself," and really give yourself the moment to kind of breathe and take it all in, I think you'll find yourself able to then go back and focus more. Okay?

And the last thing I want to leave you with I think the thing that is the biggest detriment to focusing is beating yourself up over your inability to focus. I mean is there more of a catch 22 that you're not able to focus, so you punish yourself, and the more you punish yourself the less able you are to focus.

BLAME BLOCKS LEARNING

See, blaming blocks learning. Whether you're blaming yourself or you're blaming someone else, when you're in the blame space, you cannot learn. You also cannot focus, because what you're focusing on is how you're not accomplishing or how it's not working or how it sucks or they suck or you suck or whatever.

You're not actually focusing on accomplishing something. Stop beating yourself up about it. You know, in meditation there is this concept of noticing when your mind goes off on a track and just gently bringing it back to the breath, and then you breathe and you breathe and then, "Oh yeah, you, know I was talking to so and so..."



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"Ah wait, my brain has wandered off track. Okay breathe, breathe, breathe. I can't believe she said that to me. Oh my God," and then breathe, breathe, breathe, right? Your brain's job is to think about stuff. It's what it does. but rather than blaming it or shaming it for thinking about what you want, something other than what you're trying to focus on. Just notice that it's gone off and bring it back and breathe and breathe.

FORGIVENESS – WHEN YOU LOSE FOCUS, NOTICE IT AND CHOOSE TO FOCUS AGAIN.

ONE MOMENT AT A TIME.

And there's something very loving and forgiving around just noticing that you've lost focus and choosing to focus again. And choosing to focus again. And choosing to focus again. There's not, "Oh my God, I'm so bad and wrong for not focusing. Why can't I do this?" There's just choosing to focus again.

And, "Oh there goes the phone." Choosing to focus again. Do you see what I mean? So just with forgiveness, when you notice that you are off track. just bring yourself back on track again. Simply, plainly. When you lose focus, notice it and choose to focus again. One moment at a time.

ASSESS AND ADJUST – TREAT THIS LIKE AN EXPERIMENT

And finally and I talked a bit about this earlier, come from a perspective of a assessing and adjusting. Treat this like an experiment. It's just trying stuff out, seeing what works, keeping the stuff that works, letting go of the stuff that doesn't, and trying something else.

Out seeing if it works. Keeping it if it works. Tossing it out if it doesn't. Changing, shuffling things around. Just experiment and find what's going to work for you. And I would love if while you're doing that, if you have, you find stuff that really works for you, share that in the comment section for this class, because that could help someone else. You never know. Something that works for you could be a brilliant insight for someone else.

So let's use the comments section to really help each other in our constant development of this skill of focusing. Have a great day, and I look forward to seeing your comments, and next week is the Ask Coach Debra call. Feel free to submit questions about your focusing issues for the next Ask Coach Debra call. Thanks very much for your focus during this class, and we'll talk soon.