



## How Focused Are You?

**I**n a world of endless emails, overflowing inboxes, mountains of files in your office, countless voicemails, non-stop back-to-back meetings, tasks, and responsibilities to manage:

- How are you able to maintain and improve productivity and keep your focus on results?
- Does your boss give you that "look" when you scramble for details?
- Do you inspire your people by being organized?
- Do you sometimes doubt your ability to truly and effectively manage yourself?
- Do you wonder why some people have clean desks, and are *more* productive than you?

The key is **FOCUS!** Without it: life is difficult—work is frustrating—careers get derailed. High-performing executives have extraordinary focus. They report the experience of "time evaporating." It is total immersion in the process of doing and creating. In sports, it is known as "being in the zone." Being in the zone is critical in business. Instead of an opponent, we have interruptions: ringing phones, message lights, meetings, initiatives and crises.

We compete against the barrage of too much information and too many conflicting priorities. The opponent may also be *you*—that voice in your head that continually throws more on the plate. The constant chatter—the distracting thoughts—the things forgotten—the uncertainty about what to do next, all wearing you down!

**FOCUS** is the ability to block out the internal and external "noise," and bring our energy to bear on whatever is right in front of us. Focus is what separates effective managers from those who have scattered thoughts, actions and results. Focus allows us to give 100% to everything that is important, but in a way that adds energy instead of diffuses our energies.

Most of us focus on *at least* 2 things at any given moment. Let's say that you are using all of your mental energy to focus on the one task or conversation—that's 100% of your energy. Right? Right!!

On the other hand: Say that you are focused on *two* things at the same time—the person talking to you plus the next task you have to do after the meeting is over. That's 50% to one thing, 50% to the other, right?

**Wrong!** Trying to focus on more than one thing at a time depletes available mental energy. This means that with two things to focus on, you end up with 40% of your creative and decision-making power available for each. If you are concentrating on three things at once (not uncommon), you are reduced to 20% efficiency for each. **Thus, most managers in any given situation are utilizing between ten and twenty percent of their efficiency!** It gets worse from there! If your focus is reduced, there is a strong likelihood that you won't remember later what you did or did not complete. More importantly, you will compromise the quality of your results.

***"Multi-tasking is the enemy of excellence!!"***

—Jim Loehr co-author of The Power of Full Engagement

The good news is, **Focus** can be attained. Here are seven methods we use in our coaching programs and workshops:

- 1. Get the clutter out! Out of your office...and your head!** Take a blank piece of paper and write down everything that's in your head. That's every "to do" item in your life from "start this project" to "phone this customer" to "take your family to Hawaii for the summer." Toss away what doesn't provide value for you—all those energy drains from excess paper, knick-knacks, decorations from last year. Get it all out! Be ruthless!
- 2. Next, make a list of your major projects, and translate each project to a specific "next action".** Each project should only have *one* next action, and it should start with an action verb, such as: "Call Joe to...", or "Calculate pricing for...". Next actions should be date-driven, as can be done easily with Microsoft Outlook.
- 3. Develop an organization system to efficiently capture all items in #1 and #2.** Some people use a combination of computer(desktop or laptop) and paper or computer - or - paper and a PDA (such as a Pocket PC, Blackberry or Palm) - or - just a computer and a PDA. (You may need coaching to make sure that your tools are supporting you, not creating extra work for you in order to manage them!)

4. **Have a seamless thought process.** Many think that if they have the right tool or physical system then everything will be okay. **That is the big productivity lie we tell ourselves!!!** The most important piece of any system is YOU—the way you think, the decisions you make, the consistency of the process, your willingness to change and try new behaviors. To really be successful, you must have a process that works when things are going well, and one that holds up under pressure. This piece may be the most challenging to design.
5. **Have an In Box & Out Box on your desk**—a collection place for everything that comes into your world so that you can 'process' it into your system. If you don't have an In Box then your office **IS** your In Box! Papers will be everywhere! The Out Box is a staging place for what is ready to leave— so you don't have to get up and deliver each item as it's completed. Force yourself to deal with in-box items one at a time. Items that **can't be handled in 2 minutes or less** should have a specific file that is easily accessible and front-of-mind.
6. **Clean up communication.** Incomplete and negative interactions are emotional drains on our energy. Begin this process by making a list of the people with whom you feel "out of balance" and why. Set up a time to talk and re-align the relationship (these should go on your next-action lists)
7. **Make realistic promises.** Learn how to say "no" or "not this week, next week." Promise only what you can deliver, you then gain credibility with others. This also is a stress-buster, making more of you available for performance. Broken promises attack our self-esteem and others respect for us – whether they tell us or not! Success builds success!

At the Effective Edge, we have both coaching programs and hands-on classroom workshops to help you implement these steps, and others, so you can stay in a focused 'zone'. Visit us on the web at: <http://www.effectiveedge.com/> or contact:

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Have an Effective day!