

RECHARGE!

POSITIVE – POWERFUL – PRACTICAL

Issue #11 October 2012



CAREER

PARALYSIS

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5 Strategies to Minimize Distractions and Maximize Productivity

In this digital age, we are always on and always connected. There are always a dozen demands in a dozen different directions. We are overwired, and it is changing what we do, how we do it, how we think, and how effective we are. Business owners are at an even higher risk for being overwired. We have the work of running the business, plus the added demands of being responsive to clients, associates and employees. We have to make sure everyone has what they need, and this often comes at the cost of overwiring ourselves.

Unfortunately, living and working overwired diminishes our productivity, cripples our short-term intelligence, and impairs our ability to retain knowledge long-term. Yes, the ripple effect of all that technology isn't just distracting you, it may be making you dumb. It is certainly making you less effective. And that's an expensive problem.

Based on conservative estimates from my book, *Rewired: How to Work Smarter, Live Better, and Be Purposefully Productive in an Overwired World*, two bad habits brought on by overusing technology can be costing you over 48% of your salary every year.

The culprits? Interruptions and multitasking. Studies show time and again that distractions cost big bucks (upwards of \$700 billion a year in lost revenues for American companies alone). But we don't have to live and work overwired. We can break the cycle of distraction.

Here are five simple strategies to minimize distractions, maximize productivity and rewire for greater results.

#1. Break the email addiction

Email is a pervasive interrupter and is at the heart of multitasking. We've all felt the pressure of email: So many messages, so little time, and so many important projects demanding our attention. Why do we get hooked on email? Well, we are neurologically wired to seek out novelty, and there is always something "new" in our inbox. We are also wired to seek out connection, so email fits this neurological bill nicely. Except that it's insidious.

Here is how you can free yourself (and others) from the tyranny of email:

➔ **CLARIFY EXPECTATIONS** – What is an appropriate response time for email? Is it one hour? One day? Who needs to be cc'd on what? A little clarity will free you and your colleagues.

➔ **CELEBRATE SOLUTIONS, NOT EMPTY INBOXES** – All too often the urge to hit emails back overshadows our commitment to answer the problem at hand. Who needs to be involved? What is the ideal way to communicate? Is it easier and more productive to call?

➔ **SCHEDULE REGULAR, FINITE BLOCKS OF TIME FOR EMAIL** – Stop checking your email every five minutes, or whenever the little red icon appears. Instead, schedule time to check your email, and do only that. Set aside maybe 15 minutes, once an hour or so. Then don't check again. Turn off the email alert and try closing down your email program completely.

#2. Limit your gadgets

We all love our gadgets, but do you really need so many? Most of us have a desktop, a laptop, an iPad, an iPod, a Blackberry, and/or an iPhone all going at once. Too much is too much. Only use what you need, when you need it. If possible:

➔ **LIMIT YOURSELF TO TWO MACHINES AT A TIME** – a phone and whichever machine you will work on.

➔ **SHUT DOWN THE OTHERS OR PUT THEM AWAY.**

➔ **TRY TO LIMIT ALL YOUR CALLS TO ONE NUMBER** – so you don't have to answer two phones.

#3. Use technology in your favor

Technology may have driven us to distraction, but it is important to remember that it is absolutely wonderful,

too, and we can use it to our advantage. Use technology, instead of letting it use you!

For example:

➔ **USE YOUR SPAM FILTER JUDICIOUSLY**

-Isn't it nice to have a less cluttered inbox? And all those lists and blasts? Take the time to opt out. Better yet, don't sign up in the first place.

➔ **LET CALLS GO TO VOICEMAIL** – Unless it is critical for you to take the call, let it go to voicemail. Return the call during a time when you aren't focused on a project.

➔ **USE CALL FORWARDING** – This helps you limit the number of phones you have to answer.

#4. Prevent brain drain.

We've all had those days where we seem to do "nothing" but sit in front of a computer, and yet are exhausted at the end of the day. Why is this? How could we be so drained?

It's because the thinking part of our brain, the prefrontal cortex, can only focus with intensity for 90 minutes. After that, attention wanes, effectiveness plummets, and precious resources are lost. When we are fatigued, we are more susceptible to interruptions. So don't let your brain drain. Here's how to prevent brain drain:

➔ **SHIFT YOUR STATE** – Schedule regular breaks that shift your mental, emotional and physical state. Get up and leave your desk, and leave all screens behind. Go for a walk outside. Stretch. Just do something completely different and active. This allows the brain to rejuvenate and excess neurochemicals (cortisol, adrenaline, etc) to drop. It is also a great way to improve your focus.

➔ **OPTIMIZE YOUR BREAKS** – Meditation has a profound impact on brain health. Naps are perhaps the simplest, most potent strategy. 15 minutes horizontal relieves stress on your physical body and rejuvenates the mind. If you can, take a cat nap. Trust me, innovative workspaces like Zappos and YouTube are keenly aware of the corporate benefits of napping. They cultivate this with nap pods and nap rooms.

#5. Become purposefully productive

Part of the challenge of living overwired is that we are always on, always connected, and never done with work. At least that's the way we feel. Although we might be physically home with our families, we are still back

in the office in our minds. When we never shut down, not only does this disappoint our loved ones, but we never rejuvenate ourselves. It is like starting the next day with only half a tank of gas.

The key is to become purposefully productive by effectively closing out your workday. Carve out 15 minutes at the end of your day to:

➔ **CAPTURE OUTSTANDING PROJECTS ONTO ONE LIST** – More technology means more input, which can mean more distractions or dropped balls. Capture the desired outcome for each item.

➔ **DELETE AND DELEGATE** – What is non-essential? What can be deleted? What can be delegated? What can I say no to?

➔ **PRIORITIZE AND PLAN** – This means looking at your calendar, reviewing commitments, assessing priorities and then blocking out projects into 90-minute intervals.

➔ **PREPARE** – What do you need to ensure tomorrow's success? What do you need to do, to bring, to read, etc. to optimize your commitments?

Spending time at the end of the day thinking about upcoming projects, priorities and meetings will help you get organized for the next day, and help you minimize the distractions that can so easily derail productivity. Plus, you will not be distracted in the evening.

With a few strategies and a little discipline, you can learn to work smarter, be more productive and live happier. The key is to identify the distractions, take steps to minimize them and be proactive about keeping your brain and body as healthy as possible in our overwired world.

RE by Camille Preston



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