

How to Eliminate Distractions



Everything demands your attention. Today, devices, email and social media all vie for your heed at any given moment. The cost of these distractions to your personal and professional lives is well documented. Researchers at the University of California, Irvine found that it takes a typical office worker 25 minutes to return to the original task after an interruption, and an experiment by the authors of [*The Plateau Effect: Getting from Stuck to Success*](#) found that work interruptions decreased accuracy by 20 percent.

There are other, less evident distractions, too. Surrounding yourself with negative people has been shown to influence weight gain, smoking and even your likelihood of divorce.

Take these steps to slash cognitive and emotional distractions, increase focus and thrive:

1. [Stop digital pressures.](#)

Carve out blocks of time—whether for work, exercise or people you care about—and turn off your phone and computer. Download the free app SelfControl, which shuts off especially distracting websites such as social media or news pages for a set period of time.

2. [Give yourself frequent breaks.](#)

Just because you can work 24/7 doesn't mean your mind or body are designed to do so.

3. Mind your physical health.

Exercise, plenty of sleep, healthy eating and all of those things you know you're supposed to do promote mental health and focus.

4. Turn off smartphone notifications.

Limit the number of times per day you check and respond to email, texts and social media. Remove the temptation to constantly keep an eye on these pests.

5. Knock out the most dreaded duties first thing in the morning.

Have a difficult email you must send? Bills to manage? Need to initiate a difficult conversation? Get it off your to-do list and out of your mind, freeing you to be productive.

6. Eliminate or minimize negative people in your life.

These are people who play the victim, are stuck in unhealthy habits, or generally make you feel drained or bad about yourself. Surround yourself with those who are positive, focused, productive and ambitious¹. Remember the late iconic speaker Jim Rohn's rule: "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with."

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Kirsten Searer

36; Las Vegas; senior director of communications for Education Pioneers

It's difficult to [balance the daily grind](#) of emails, social media and fires that pop up versus the thoughtful, strategic work I need to do to help transform my organization. I would feel frustrated, discouraged and overwhelmed that I worked long days and still needed extensions for my biggest goals and projects. I recently took control of my schedule. I identified four major goals for the year and outlined a percentage of time to dedicate to each. I start each week by writing out my intentions for each goal, then I [map out a specific to-do list](#) to support that work. I also leave time open for stuff that comes up so I don't feel stressed if I am sidetracked by other projects. I allocate time to spend networking or checking in with my colleagues to ensure I'm always

making new connections. I push for shorter meetings, delegate when possible and keep Fridays mostly open, so I can catch up on the big goals. It isn't natural for me to be so structured with my time, but now I'm more productive and in control of my workdays. My boss is happy with my progress, too.



Tehsin Bhayani

34; Toronto; co-founder and CEO of Serind Labs

Whenever I hit an obstacle, I'd stop and watch *Lost* or *Entourage*, and I didn't return to my work until at least one episode was over. My company suffered as a result. Then I committed to practicing one new productivity habit every week and recorded my progress. Some of these habits include getting eight hours of sleep nightly, waking up at 5 a.m. and making my bed. I now [read an average of two books monthly](#), no longer hang out with friends who start conversations by complaining, and joined a co-working space where I'm surrounded by people who are driven by great ideas, optimism and who possess the work ethic to make their ideas a reality. I still struggle with some newer habits, but it's changed my life.



Alex Berger

31; Copenhagen; product marketing manager of Adform

A few years ago, I learned to differentiate between people who saw the world through "if only" and "stuff happens" mindsets and systematically eliminated those whom I identified as the former. People who respond to matters with "if only" have a victim mentality. "If only I had his money, then I would be successful," "If only I had his luck, I would be in a happy relationship." They are so caught up in looking outward that they [miss out on opportunities](#) when they present themselves because they lack the focus to see or act on them. People with "stuff happens" mindsets acknowledge difficulties or setbacks, shrug them off, and focus on shaping their forward opportunities. Before I realized this difference, I spent a lot of energy trying to save the "if only" people who just dragged me down and depleted my energy. This shift was critical to my success in grad school, [landing a great job](#) and building a really fantastic life as an expat living in Europe.

This article originally appeared in the [September 2016 issue of *SUCCESS* magazine.](#)