

In my most recent blog, I wrote about how we've allowed technology to take a pernicious toll on our attention, and in turn, on our creativity, our resilience, our relationships and, ultimately, our productivity.

This week I'm turning my focus to how to wrest back control of your attention, so you can make conscious choices that provide long term satisfaction rather than instant but fleeting gratification.

What follows are seven steps, but you're vastly more likely to succeed if you limit yourself to one or two at a time.

1. Start to focus on what you're doing with your attention. You can't change what you don't notice. For three designated hours during the next 24, keep careful track of how frequently you feel compelled to check one or another of your digital devices, and to move between activities.

Begin by getting a notebook or a pad. Each time you feel an impulse to go online — or to shift your attention to something else when you're already online — make a check in your notebook. If you decide to follow your impulse, circle the check you've made.

At the end of three hours, you'll have a clear picture of how intense the pull is on your attention. The number of checks will tell you how frequently you feel distracted, and the number of circles will tell you how often you succumb to your impulse. Just by paying attention, you'll give in less often than you ordinarily do.

2. Take a few minutes every day — either just before you leave work, or just before you go to sleep — to define and write down the two or three most important things you want to accomplish tomorrow, and when you intend to work on them.

3. Do the most important activity first in the morning, for a designated period of time no longer than 90 minutes, with every digital device you own turned to silent. If you can do this, you'll accomplish more in that time than most people do in an entire day (including you, when you're constantly moving between activities.)

4. Eliminate as much "insecurity work" from your life as possible. My friend Scott Belsky came up with this brilliant phrase to describe the aimless things we do over and over to reassure

ourselves we matter — Googling your own name; checking your number of Twitter followers or your Klout ranking; peeking at your website's analytics; and looking up your Amazon ranking if you've written a book.

5. Keep a running list of everything that's on your mind — in order to get it off your mind. Our working memories have very limited capacity, so the more things you're thinking about, the fewer of them you're likely to remember.

I download everything from "to do's," to ideas I'm having, to people I need to email or call, to issues that are bothering me. Writing all this down, as it arises, literally clears space in our working memories for whatever most deserves our attention.

6. Each time you go online to do anything, ask yourself "Is this best use of my time?" Sometimes, of course, it will be. Often, however, it's something you do automatically, or as a way to avoid more difficult work. If you realize it isn't the best use of your time, ask yourself "What is?" — and do that.

7. Systematically, train your attention. A simple way is to read more books, preferably good ones. Deeply focused, uninterrupted reading is a very good way to train and sustain your brain's capacity for absorbed attention.

A second alternative is to practice a breath-counting meditation — in to a count of three, out to a count of six — for two to five minutes several times a day. It's not just a way to teach the brain to focus on one thing at a time, but also a very effective strategy for relaxing physically and emotionally. In as little as one minute of focused breathing, it's possible to completely clear the bloodstream of the stress hormone cortisol.

Above all else, build back into your life stopping times, finish lines and boundaries. That's what we've lost in our digital world. When you're engaged, be fully engaged, for a defined period of time and then stop. When you do take a break, chill out and truly renew. Earn it, and then enjoy it.

Fuente: HBR Blog by Tony Schwartz