

“Free to Focus”  
Michael Hyatt  
Book Note By Dave Kraft

What will your life have been, in the end, but the sum total of everything you spent it focusing on? My problem back then was doing too much—mostly by myself. Later I realized focusing on everything means focusing on nothing. “Information consumes the attention of its recipients,” he explained, and “a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention.” The truth is we live and labor in the Distraction Economy. Research shows we get interrupted or distracted every three minutes on average. “The modern workday seems custom-built to destroy individual focus.” we’re tyrannized by tiny tasks. The dollar value on lost productivity does matter, but it’s not what really hurts. It’s all the dreams left unexplored, the talents left untried, the goals left unpursued.

Similarly, six in ten surveyed by the American Psychological Association in 2017 said they’re stressed at work, and almost four in ten say it’s not the result of one-off projects; it’s constant. A study by the Center for Creative Leadership, for instance, found that professionals with smartphones—and that’s pretty much all of us now—engage with their work more than seventy hours a week. According to a study commissioned by the software company Adobe, US workers spend more than six hours every day checking email. 40 percent of us check email after 11:00 at night, and three quarters of us do it on the weekends.

The most productive business leaders I coach recognize productivity is not about getting more things done; it’s about getting the right things done. To get at the heart of the problem, we’ll explore three common productivity objectives. The first two are all too common but generally ineffective. the important question is not, Can I do this job faster, easier, and cheaper? It’s, Should I be doing this job at all? New tech solutions may enable us to work faster, but more significantly, that efficiency brings with it the temptation and expectation to work more. The problem is, most of us have never stopped to define what success means. It’s like running a race with no finish line or leaving for a trip without knowing where we want to end up. We are living in a period of what German philosopher Josef Pieper called “total work,” where labor drives life, not the other way around.

When Kronos Incorporated and Future Workplace checked with more than six hundred human resources leaders, 95 percent said burnout is undermining their employee retention efforts. Most sobering of all, researchers say workplace stress factors in at least 120,000 deaths per year in the US alone. Sometimes, though, the relentless pursuit of “success” keeps us always on, always engaged, and always available. Productivity should free you to pursue what’s most important to you.

1. Freedom to Focus.

Think back over the last couple of weeks. How much of your time were you free to focus—truly concentrate—on your work? To sit down and attack one task with absolute attention: no distractions, no calls or texts or emails, nobody dropping in to say hi or to ask you a question about something that really didn’t matter to you?

2. Freedom to Be Present.

I’m after productivity, not efficiency, which means ensuring significant margin that enables me to be fully present wherever I am.

3. Freedom to Be Spontaneous.

4. Freedom to Do Nothing.

The best objective should be to free yourself to focus on what matters most to you. Productivity should ultimately give you back more time, not require more of you. They start with a picture of what they want their lives to look like before they try to fit their jobs into it. That's what productivity gives you: the freedom to choose what you want to focus your time and energy on.

## CREATE YOUR PRODUCTIVITY VISION

“Everybody ends up somewhere in life. A few people end up somewhere on purpose.” Andy Stanley

### The Intersection of Passion and Proficiency

Proficiency is something else entirely. Proficiency doesn't refer to how much you enjoy doing something; it describes how well you actually do it.

Passion along the left from low to high

(2) <b>Distraction Zone</b> (High Passion but low proficiency)	(1) <b>Desire Zone</b> (High passion & high proficiency)
(4) <b>Drudgery Zone</b> (Low passion and low proficiency)	(3) <b>Disinterest Zone</b> (Low passion & high proficiency)

Proficiency along the bottom from low to high

Zone 4: **The Drudgery Zone** (Low Passion and low Proficiency)

Zone 3: **The Disinterest Zone** (High proficiency and low Passion) Most of us are naturally inclined to avoid Drudgery Zone tasks, but we often get stuck in a rut doing Disinterest Zone activities simply because we're good at them.

Zone 2: **The Distraction Zone** (High passion and low proficiency) The Distraction Zone is made up of things that you are passionate about but sadly have little proficiency for. your passion can mask your lack of proficiency—but only to yourself.

Zone 1: **The Desire Zone** (High passion and high proficiency) The Desire Zone is the point where your passion and proficiency intersect,

Realizing that it's okay to delegate everything—and I do mean everything—that's not in my Desire Zone has been one of the most freeing things I can imagine.

True productivity is about doing more of what is in your Desire Zone and less of everything else.

### Limiting Beliefs, Liberating Truths

We could fill a whole book with limiting beliefs, but let's zero in on the seven that most impact our efforts to become more productive.

1. I just don't have enough time. Replace it with this liberating truth: I have all the time I need to accomplish what matters most.
2. I'm just not that disciplined.

3. I'm not really in control of my time. I have the ability to make better use of the time I do control.
4. Highly productive people are just born that way. Productivity is a skill I can develop.
5. I tried before, and it didn't work. I can get better results by trying a different approach.
6. My circumstances won't allow it right now, but they're only temporary. I don't have to wait until my circumstances change to get started and make progress.
7. I'm not good with technology. True productivity doesn't require complex technology or systems. It's more about aligning my daily activities with my priorities, and I can do that.

Rejuvenate. Push past fifty hours of work in a week and there's no productivity gain for the extra time.

The more you work beyond a fifty-hour threshold, according to this study, the less productive you become.

Here are seven practices to consider and implement:

Practice 1: Sleep. In another study, people getting just six hours a night for two straight weeks functioned as if they were legally drunk.

Practice 2: Eat. Don't eat too much and eat healthily

Practice 3: Move. Russell Clayton, writing in the Harvard Business Review, asserts, "New research . . . demonstrates a clear relationship between physical activity that is planned, structured, repetitive, and purposive . . . and one's ability to manage the intersection between work and home."

Practice 4: Connect. It's not just about managing your workload and taking breaks; it's just as important to manage the energy sources around you. Productivity, in other words, is interpersonal. Some of these people come with batteries included, as I heard Dan Sullivan once say. They charge you up. Others don't, and they drain you. Either way, they all impact your energy. Henry Cloud recommends a social audit. Are you surrounding yourself with energy producers or energy drainers?

Practice 5: Play. We all know about the habits of highly successful people, but what about their hobbies?

Practice 6: Reflect

Practice 7: Unplug. Whatever the reason, it is important to get comfortable saying no. Few things will energize you and your productivity more than the powerful little word no. Now let's learn how to use it.

Understand Time Dynamics Even if we hate saying no, we must understand that every yes inherently contains a no. The truth is, even if we hate saying no, we're unknowingly saying no all the time—every time we say yes. Everything that is outside your Desire Zone is a possible candidate for elimination.

To help, here are five tips for a tactful no to things not in your Desire Zone:

1. Acknowledge your resources are finite. If you want to avoid total burnout, you've got to budget your time and energy much like you'd budget your finances.
2. Determine who needs access to you and who doesn't. While an open-door policy sounds like a good idea in theory, in practice it can ensure you never get your own work done. If you are the go-to person for

every project and problem, your system is fundamentally broken. You can serve only so many people well, so make sure you're prioritizing the ones who really need your personal and direct attention.

3. Let your calendar say no for you. I consider the trade-off, and I let my calendar say no for me.

4. Adopt a strategy for responding to requests.

Four strategies for dealing with demands on our time:

First is accommodation.

The second is attack.

Third is avoidance.

Fortunately, there's a fourth strategy, affirmation.

This healthy response is a "positive no," and it's built around a simple formula with three parts: yes-no-yes. It works like this:

Yes. Say yes to yourself and to protecting what is important to you.

No. The answer continues with a matter-of-fact no that is clear and sets boundaries.

Yes. End the response by affirming the relationship again and by offering another solution to the person's request.

5. Accept the fact that you will be misunderstood. If you don't respect your own boundaries, no one else will either. As Steve Jobs said, "Innovation means saying no to a thousand things."

Delegate

If you insist on doing jobs for which you lack passion and proficiency, congratulations: you win the trophy for worst hiring manager ever.

The Delegation Hierarchy

Priority 1: Drudgery Zone.

Priority 2: Disinterest Zone.

Priority 3: Distraction Zone.

Priority 4: Desire Zone.

If you selected a competent team member and properly prepare them for the task, they'll be able to pull it off. Stand back and let them run with it. You will simply never become free to focus on the things that really matter—your top priorities, your key relationships, your most important projects—until you learn how and why to delegate.

Consolidate.

Batching is one of the best ways I know to stay focused and blast through tasks.

We need extended periods of uninterrupted time to do our best thinking. We call that deep work.

**Front Stage** ~ I'm talking key functions,

**Back Stage** ~ For most of us, Back Stage includes step-two activities (specifically, elimination, automation, and delegation) plus coordination, preparation, maintenance, and development. Back Stage tasks are necessary for Front Stage performance.

**Off Stage** ~ This one's easy. Off Stage refers to time when you're not working,

An actor doesn't live on the stage; he works there. You can't live in your job either. You can either live on purpose, according to a plan you've set. Or you can live by accident, responding to the demands of others. We know from Parkinson's Law that work expands to fill the available time; the lesson for us is that we must limit the availability or it will balloon into the early morning and late evenings.

The trick is to avoid doing Back Stage work during Front Stage time.

Spreading your focus over a million different inputs undermines your productivity, creativity, momentum, and satisfaction. It's not a matter of genius-level intellect; it's simply a matter of focus and intentionality—two powerful forces that anyone can harness.

We are all busy, and we could all come up with an endless list of things that could be done. We may even convince ourselves they should be done. But do they all have to be done right now? Just because something is important doesn't mean it's important right now. The trick is to systematically decide what deserves your attention now, what deserves your attention later, and what doesn't deserve your attention at all. The more places you keep tasks and notes the more likely you'll drop balls. One of the biggest reasons people stumble with their most important goals and projects is they lose visibility.

As for tasks, I always shoot for three, and only three, key tasks each day. I call these my Daily Big 3. Listing only three tasks for an entire workday may seem like a cop-out, but it requires more discipline and effort than you realize. It takes much more effort to look at the twelve things you could do and zero in on the three that really matter. The Weekly Preview, Weekly Big 3, and Daily Big 3 ensure we not only keep visibility on all the potential tasks we have, they also set hard boundaries around our time.

You should engage email or Slack no more than two or three times a day. Proactively set and enforce boundaries. Proactively communicating about your availability puts you in charge. "You are your own disturber practically 50 percent of the time." We need tactics to help us regain, retain, and ultimately retrain our focus. I've learned over the years that high-achievers become the go-to problem-solvers for everyone around them. And while we're on that point, take a minute and look at your quarterly goals, your Weekly Big 3, and your Daily Big 3. What are those worth to you? What would accomplishing them make possible in your life and business?

"Amateurs sit and wait for inspiration, the rest of us just get up and go to work." Stephen King

We overvalue our current systems and resist change—even if that change will bring about immediate, life-altering benefits.