



5-STEP attention CHALLENGE

You think you're paying attention—YOU'RE NOT.

We live in an attention deficit society. Technology distracts us. Social Media overwhelms us. Daily to-do lists leave us feeling exhausted. We are constantly being asked to do more with less, to the point we have lost sight of what is important as we race each day to cross off another meaningless task or chore.

I believe in order to be influential in the world, and make a true impact on it; we must give our undivided attention to people and things that matter most in our lives. Instead, we are allowing those that are most important to compete with all of our daily distractions. It's time to commit to change.

Attention isn't a little thing. It's everything. What you focus on grows. What you don't, goes. When you decide what gets your attention, that becomes your future. I challenge you to start turning your life into one of attention abundance instead of distractions in five steps. Are you up for the challenge? It won't be easy. It will bring to light the aspects in your life that are worthy of your focus, your time and your undivided attention.

STEP 1. IDENTIFY WHAT MATTERS MOST

Grab a piece of paper and write down three priorities that come to mind at home, at work and in your community. Perhaps it's the name of people, or high-profile goals. Maybe it's a charitable cause or public service. Either way, be specific in each of the three categories and limit yourself to no more than three priorities for each. This step is going to help you identify what matters most to you, the core of you. These are the priorities that get you out of bed each morning, and give you a sense of purpose. When we attempt to define too many priorities, we dilute the meaning of those that matter most.

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STEP 2. BE ACCOUNTABLE TO THE CALENDAR

With your limited priority list now identified, it's time to get selective with your calendar of commitments. We only get 365 days each year to reach our goals and objectives. That's a pretty tight calendar budget if it's not managed wisely. Consider this, if you only had \$365 dollars in the bank and were forced to choose between food and jewelry - you'd choose food, right? That's easy. So why do we think of the days in a year any differently? We are all working from the same limited budget of days, yet some are too quick to spend their days on what doesn't matter. It's time to be accountable to our calendar.

- > **First . . .** go through your work calendar and identify two meetings this week that are not necessary. If you feel the objective of the meeting can be accomplished in a simple phone call or email, choose those options instead. If you have the meetings scheduled merely out of routine and habit, they aren't needed. If you are attending meetings and feel they are not a valuable use of your time, decline them.
- > **Second . . .** for those meetings you choose to keep on your work calendar, email the host and request an agenda. Take a few moments to be certain your time will be respected and used wisely. If you are the host, give respects to the attendees by creating an agenda that you commit to using and sticking to. If you want others to respect your time, you must first start by respecting theirs.
- > **Third . . .** at home, review your personal commitments and obligations. Have you accepted a dinner invite you didn't really desire to attend? Perhaps you have requests for lunch, parties and gatherings that you aren't certain how you'll fit into your already tight calendar of events. If any of these scenarios sound familiar, it's time to employ the power of one simple word: "No." That's right, "no." "No" is a complete sentence and doesn't require explanation. Your time is your time, and only is gifted to others when their requests of it fall in line with the priorities you listed in step one. When you say "no" to some, you're saying "yes" to whom and what matters most. Consider this - if there is a dinner invitation you've received that you're not thrilled to attend, and you would rather stay home and watch a movie with your family, who is going to benefit the most from you saying "yes" to the dinner invite? You? Your family? No - the person with the invitation is the one that benefits. If they are not in your list of priorities, then you are allowing them to take time away from those truly deserving of your time.


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STEP 3. BE ACCOUNTABLE TO THE CLOCK

There are only 1,440 minutes in each day. Considering we sleep approximately 440 of those, we are left with only 1,000 minutes to accomplish what truly needs to be done each day. We are all gifted with the same amount of time in a day; how we choose to use it and prioritize it is solely up to us.

Have you ever stopped to consider the amount of time you spend each day on social media? What about watching television? How about checking email? Now, consider how much time you spend building relationships with family, friends, colleagues and clients? Who is winning your attention and what is stealing your time. I want you to consider your day in 15 minute increments. Discipline yourself to limiting time on non-essential tasks for 15 minutes only. Dedicate at least 15 minutes of time to those that haven't been getting it.

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- > **First . . .** upon waking in the morning, take 15 minutes to check social media and read the news - then log off. Do not give into temptation to check it again until your next scheduled 15 minute window - either later that night or the next morning. Utilize apps that block alerts and notifications on your phone to avoid distractions they cause.
 - > **Second . . .** review your daily calendar and challenge yourself and your team to cut back meetings to 15 minutes only. Require agendas and don't permit devices that cause distractions. When you limit meetings to 15 minutes, you'll reach agreements more quickly and be less likely to get lost on non-related topics.
 - > **Third . . .** schedule 3 - 15 minutes increments time for checking email throughout your workday. When your 15 minutes is up, turn off your email and turn your attention to accomplishing projects, tasks and priorities. Move away from allowing email to run your day and dictate how your time is to be spent. Emails are just another person's request for your time to do what they need to accomplish their tasks.
 - > **Fourth . . .** dedicate 15 minutes each night to having one-on-one conversations with each person in your household. Give them a minimum of 15 minutes of your time without technology, tv or distractions. You'd be surprised how your relationships grow when you invest your undivided attention into them.
 - > **Fifth. . .** allow yourself 15 minutes each day for decompression and quiet time. Give your body and your mind an opportunity to quiet and rest. Go for a walk. Take a hot bath. Get a stretch. Meditate. Either way, permit your mind to quiet down so it has an opportunity to recharge for the following day.

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STEP 4. PUT TECHNOLOGY IN ITS PLACE

By silencing distractions, such as smartphones, people begin to excel at their jobs, relationships and tasks. A cell phone is a crutch. It fools us into believing everything is an emergency, even when the situation is far from it. When people let go of the need to connect, they get better at sleeping, they come to work refreshed, they learn to trust their instincts, and they begin to rely on their skills and knowledge. In short, they become better leaders, better middle managers, and better employees. They also become better spouses, better parents and their quality of life grows.

- > **First . . .** use your Do Not Disturb function on your phone. Schedule it to turn on from 8pm to 8am each morning. This will ensure time each night is spent focused and dedicated on your personal well-being. In this time period, you can exercise, spend time in uninterrupted conversation with friends and family, sleeping and resting up for a more productive day following.
- > **Second . . .** do not permit technology in meetings. If you are hosting a meeting, make it known on the invite and in the agenda that your meeting is a no-phone zone. If you're going to be cutting down meetings to 15-minute increments, every minute requires each participant's undivided attention.
- > **Third . . .** make your dinner table a no-phone zone. If you are out to dinner with friends, make a deal that the first person to look at their phone has to buy dinner. If you are at dinner with your family, put all devices away and keep them off the table. Use that time to make genuine connections with those you are dining with.
- > **Fourth . . .** use smartphone apps to silence your phone throughout the day when you are otherwise committed to scheduled activities such as checking email, focusing on projects or accomplishing tasks. You will maximize your productivity when you keep your focus exclusively on one task as a time instead of allowing yourself to be distracted every few minutes.

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STEP 5. GIFT YOUR TIME

Our society depends on each of us to give the gift of our time to charitable causes and be purposeful in how we contribute to our community. Choose how you will contribute to causes that matter to you and your community. Be intentional in scheduling time to volunteer, donate and help others. Reflect back on Step 1 and what you listed as your priorities. Decide how you will contribute to aiding those causes and make the commitment to follow through.

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