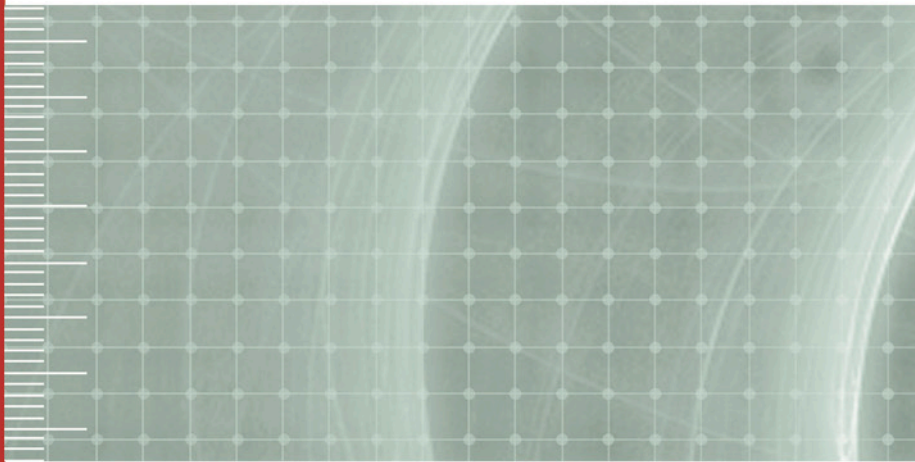


S T **^** G E N



ATTENTION MANAGEMENT

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PART I: INTRODUCING ATTENTION MANAGEMENT

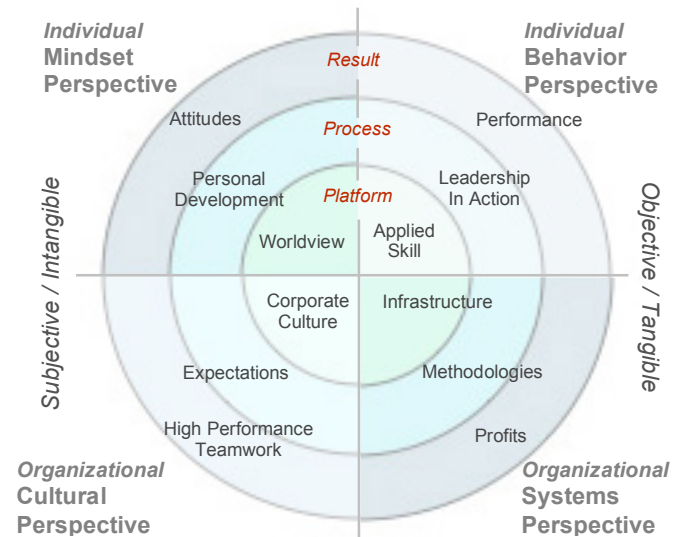
Attention management can be situated in the upper left dimension of the integral Four-quadrant Model addressing interiors (subjective) and exteriors (objective) correlated with the individual and collective dimensions of an organization. The Four-quadrant Model was developed by the Integral Institute and is adapted here with permission.¹

This module addresses specific approaches that leaders can use to modify their work environment and organizational systems (lower right) along with specific mental techniques that will significantly enhance focus (upper left), leading to substantial gains in effectiveness. It emphasizes approaches that directly impact the “mindset” (upper left) dimension and the “systems” (lower right) dimension, indirectly resulting in more effective execution evidenced in the “behavior” dimension (upper right). Although the cultural dimension is emphasized less than the others in this module, leaders will do well to consider how attention management (or lack thereof) is influenced by their organization’s corporate culture, collective expectations, and team habits (lower left).

THE NEW REALITY

Traditional time management suggests that by working harder, smarter, and faster, you will gain control over your life and be more successful. But most people struggle with ever-increasing demands on their time and a feeling of “information overwhelm.”

Many business leaders have achieved success, yet they suffer stress, anxiety, and the constant feeling of trying to catch up. People confuse efficiency (doing more things in less time) with effectiveness (doing the most important things well). In truth, most people don’t slow down long enough, or reflect deeply enough, to realize what is most important. They are



addicted to urgency, which gives them a temporary feeling of importance. After all, putting out fires lets them feel like a hero for a day or an hour.

But rarely are the urgent things truly the most important things. And spending all day in urgency leaves little time for the really important things. Ironically, if people were more proactive about strategic and important things, there would be a lot less urgency. But where do you find the time to be more proactive when you already have insufficient time to react to all the urgencies? This is called being “trapped in the Reactive Zone.” It can be like quicksand, the more you struggle, the worse it gets.

ATTENTION DEFICIT

To make things worse, we’re beginning to see an even greater problem than lack of time: lack of attention. According to Thomas Davenport and John Beck of the *Accenture Institute for Strategic Change*, most businesses today suffer from some degree of organizational ADD (attention deficit disorder).²



Their groundbreaking book, *The Attention Economy*, outlines four disturbing symptoms of organizational ADD:

1. An increased likelihood of missing key information when making decisions
2. Diminished time for reflection on anything but simple informational transactions such as email and voice mail
3. Difficulty holding others' attention, and having to increase the glitziness of presentations and the number of messages to get and keep attention
4. Decreased ability to focus when necessary

Today's typical managers live and work in a state of constant distraction. Unable to concentrate, they operate in a fog of "continual partial attention."

Understanding and managing attention is now the single most important determinant of business success.

—Thomas Davenport and John Beck

Because these managers cannot bring full intelligence, focus, and attention to one thing at a time, all their activities and relationships inevitably suffer. You may know people like this. They spend virtually every waking hour being "busy" working or catching up on necessary family activities, with little time left for personal renewal activities, much less hobbies (an idea that sounds almost quaint in today's chronically overworked culture). In a teleconference at work, they miss key information because they are simultaneously typing an email. Over lunch or dinner, they answer their cell phones, rudely cutting off the person in front of them. Like information addicts needing a fix, they feel strangely compelled to check their email and voice mail—even at home, in the evenings, or on the weekends.



The Attention Zones Model™

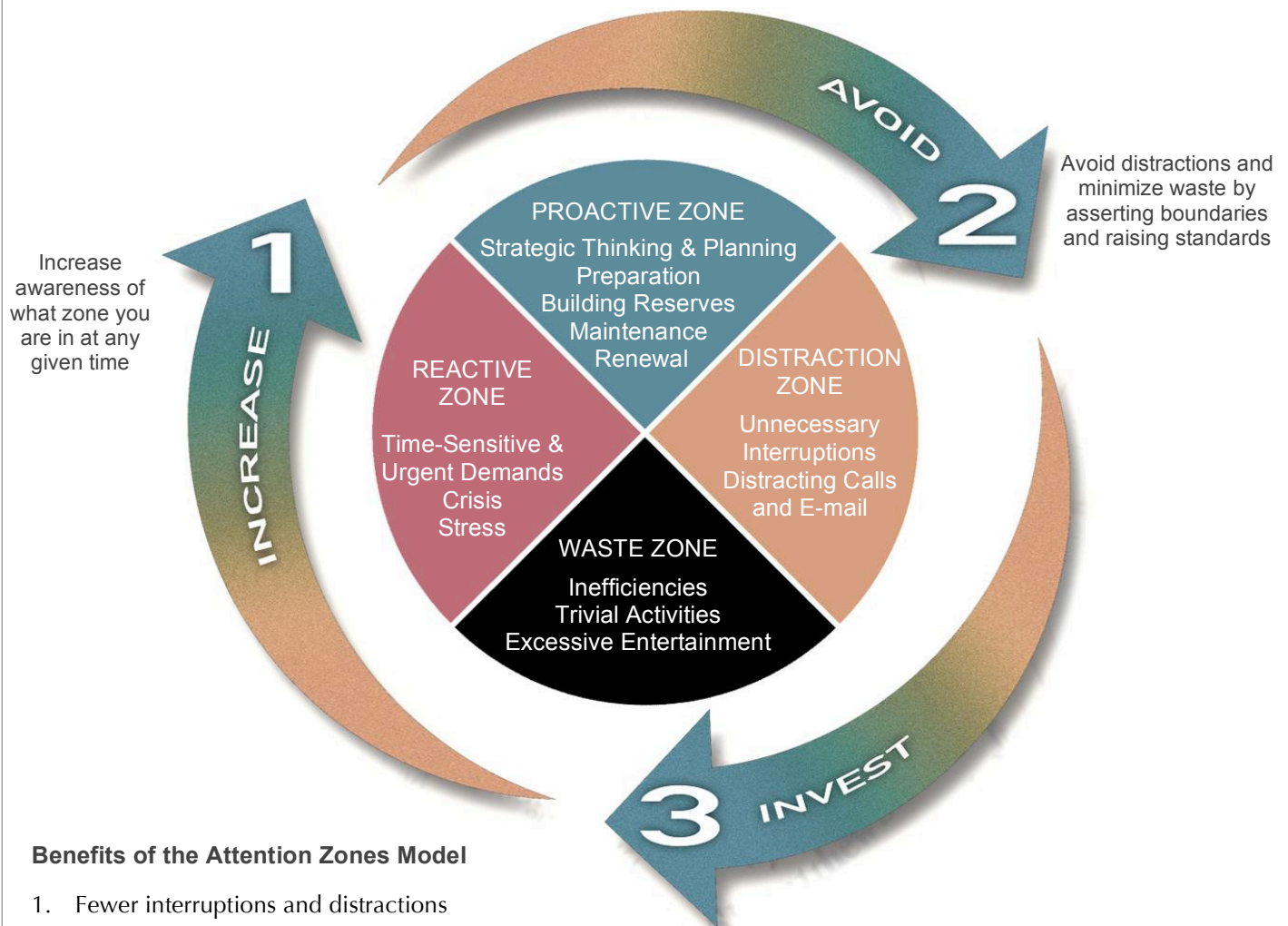
The Attention Zones Model™ (illustrated and explained on page 3) is an easy-to-understand, easy-to-implement tool for enhanced productivity. It modernizes the time management paradigm by integrating attention management. Rather than emphasizing efficiency, it focuses on effectiveness. Instead of urgency, it concentrates on proactivity. Instead of fixating on time and things, it highlights relationships and results. It has the power to free you from the Reactive Zone.

Learning Assets:

- *Is Your Job Giving You ADD?*—article by Brett Thomas and Paul Landraitus
- *Organizational ADD Self-assessment and Key*
- *Symptoms of Organizational ADD*—article by Brett Thomas and Paul Landraitus

PART II: THE ATTENTION ZONES MODEL™

Developed to help executives overcome the limitations of conventional time management approaches, the Attention Zones Model™ combines the most up-to-date thinking on this subject with cutting-edge paradigms of attention management. It provides an intuitive, easy-to-grasp method of maximizing one's productivity and effectiveness. The four zones represent the four primary ways we spend our time and attention. The numbered arrows represent the three fundamental practices that increase effectiveness.



Benefits of the Attention Zones Model

1. Fewer interruptions and distractions
2. Less wasted time and energy
3. Less reactive, more proactive
4. More focused on what's most important
5. More strategic, better planning
6. More effective and efficient



APPLYING THE ATTENTION ZONES MODEL™

As illustrated on page 3, you can significantly increase your productivity and reduce stress through three Attention Zone actions: (1) increasing your awareness of which zone you're in at any given moment, (2) avoiding distractions and minimizing waste by asserting boundaries and raising standards, and (3) reinvesting the time you've saved into being more proactive and strategic—which causes the Reactive Zone to shrink, because you are handling issues before they become urgent or problematic.

The Reactive Zone

The Reactive Zone is made up of time and attention that are focused on time-sensitive issues, urgent demands, and crisis situations. Naturally, this is the most stressful of the four zones—and urgency and crisis tend to breed more of the same. If you spend most of your time running behind, stretched by deadlines, and putting out fires, then you have very little time for things such as planning, strategic thinking, building reserves, and necessary maintenance. In other words, too much time in the Reactive Zone leaves little time and attention for the Proactive Zone.

The Proactive Zone

There is tremendous value in spending a lot more time in the Proactive Zone in order to tend to more strategic thinking and planning, preparation, building reserves (financial, systems, relationships), and essential maintenance. When these things are properly maintained, they are less likely to break down and send you spinning into the Reactive Zone. Another key proactive activity is necessary renewal to keep yourself and your resources sharp.

The value of spending more time in the Proactive Zone may be obvious—but how is it done? In mainstream business culture today, workers live and die by the clock. People feel



that there's never enough time and that they are constantly behind. How can you be more proactive when you already don't have enough to handle your existing urgent priorities?

Some efficiency experts speak of “urgency addiction” and “adrenaline addicts.” It's understandable. When you spend your day putting out fires, you enjoy the ego gratification of being a hero for a day. A large dose of adrenaline-fueled urgency gives a false feeling of importance.

Roger Bohn and Ramchandran Jaikumar, from the University of California, define a “firefighting syndrome” that includes frequent task switching, superficial approaches to problem solving, and problem recurrence.³ They say that this syndrome can be explained as a reaction to managerial pressure caused by a backlog of work (“never enough time”) but that it ends up reducing rather than increasing the total amount of work accomplished.

You might think, “I get it. I'll just stop spending so much time fighting fires in the Reactive Zone and spend more time in the Proactive Zone.” But here's the catch: you can't just decide to do that.

Since Reactive Zone activities are urgent AND important, you can't say no to them. Because they are important, you want and need to deal with them. (If it were unimportant, it would

not be in the Reactive Zone—it would be in either the Waste Zone or the Distraction Zone.)

Keep in mind that the Reactive Zone is not inherently bad; it is necessary to respond to customer and employee needs and demands. But if you spend too much time there, it quickly becomes counterproductive as it traps you in a self-perpetuating cycle.

Neglecting the Proactive Zone activities causes the urgencies and crisis situations to just keep coming with greater velocity. This is why so many people find themselves trapped in the Reactive Zone. This is what Bohn and Jaikumar mean when they call the firefighting syndrome “self-amplifying.”

Learning Assets:

- *Firefighting by Knowledge Workers*—white paper by Roger Bohn and Ramchandran Jaikumar
- *Your Most Productive Day of the Year*—video clip (2 minutes)





PART III: EMANCIPATION FROM THE REACTIVE ZONE

THE KEY: DISTRACTION AND WASTE

Ironically, the key to freeing yourself from the Reactive Zone involves the remaining two zones: the Distraction Zone and the Waste Zone. First, let's clearly define them.

I have to leave the office to get any work done.

—Typical Manager, Typical Company, Inc.

THE DISTRACTION ZONE

The Distraction Zone includes unnecessary interruptions, distracting calls, and email. Such distractions are urgent (because they grab your attention or are “in your face”), but they are not important. (If they were important, they would be in the Reactive Zone.) Maybe they are important to somebody else (the person interrupting you), but they are not priorities for you. The average manager spends 5 to 15 unproductive hours a week having their attention pulled away from what is important by distracting interruptions.

Why are we so distracted? Because we do not establish boundaries. This happens for two reasons: (1) most people do not distinguish between urgent and important, and (2) most people do not know about attention management, so they do not value their own attention enough to protect it from being scattered in different directions. (More on this to come.)

THE WASTE ZONE

The Waste Zone is made up of inefficient activities, trivial activities that do not add value, and activities that just kill time. Workplace productivity research shows that in a typical organization, a tremendous number of hours are spent each week doing meaningless activities that do nothing to forward the organization's goals. Waste Zone activities are neither urgent nor important—they are simply a waste of time.



The illustration on page 3 lists excessive entertainment as an example of a Waste Zone activity. Is there anything wrong with entertainment such as watching TV, pleasure reading, social activities, and so on?

No, not if you find the activity meaningful, valuable, and/or important. But have you ever sat in front of the television and clicked the remote from one mindless, insipid show to another, not even enjoying yourself? This is one example of the sort of mind-numbing activities we sometimes absentmindedly fall into in the Waste Zone. Another is spending time with people whom you have little in common with and whom you do not really enjoy being around. A final example of a Waste Zone activity is using your time and attention to do a task that you would be better off delegating or outsourcing.

TIME VS. ATTENTION

The 20th-century productivity paradigm of “time management” has proved to be woefully inadequate for the hyperspeed 21st-century workplace brimming with wireless phones, two-way pagers, pocket PCs, PDAs, and ubiquitous email. Time management made sense in the old days, when only one thing was happening at a time. But in today’s digital workplace, attention is proving to be far more valuable than time and is being recognized as the critical productivity factor. A more in-depth discussion of the obsolete time management paradigm can be found in the article *Why We Need to Manage Attention*.

Learning Asset: *Why We Need to Manage Attention*—article by Brett Thomas and Paul Landraitus





PART IV: UNDERSTANDING ATTENTION MANAGEMENT

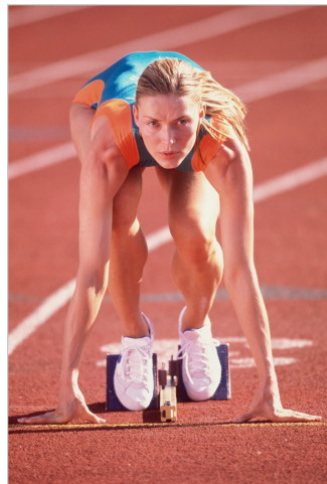
HOW FOCUSED ARE YOU?

In your own life and work, you have probably noticed that the times when you have been the most productive, most effective, and most successful were times when you were extremely focused. But if you're like most people, those times are somewhat inconsistent—and it may puzzle you how you can be so focused at certain times and completely scattered at others.

Recently, many researchers and laypeople alike have come to believe that focus, possibly more than any other factor, is what separates average performers from peak performers. Not just in sports and highly technical jobs, but in just about every endeavor in life, from working at a computer to running successful meetings—even to the quality of your relationships with your spouse, children, and loved ones. Focus, it seems, is a big deal. And judging by popular business magazines and books, it's a growing trend.

As businesspeople, we can look to other fields of high performance for clues about how to better focus. Competitive athletes understand how important focus is to performance. Phil Jackson is the world-renowned coach who led the Chicago Bulls to an unprecedented six World Championships. To help bring his players' full talent and ability to each moment, each second of the game, he taught his players advanced focus and concentration skills—what he calls “mindful basketball.” In his book *Sacred Hoops*, he writes:

“When players practice what is known as mindfulness—simply paying attention to what is happening—not only do they play better and win more, they also become more attuned to one another.”



In his book *For the Love of the Game*, Michael Jordan writes, “Phil brought in a sports psychologist to talk about getting into the zone. I had been there before, so I understood the concept. I just couldn't comprehend how to get myself in the zone consistently. He provided methods and practices designed to get us into the zone all the time. To achieve that level of awareness and understanding really involves a level of perfection. My mind still travels a bit, but Phil taught us to concentrate on breathing to bring the mind back to center.”

Learning Assets:

- *Into the Zone*—cover story by Jay Tolson in U.S. News & World Report, July 3, 2000.
- *Focus Like Tiger, Concentrate Like Michael*—video clip (2 min)
- *Three Simple Exercises to Enhance Your Focus*—video clip (3 min)
- *You Must Be Present to Win*—video clip (2 min)

THE NEW ECONOMICS

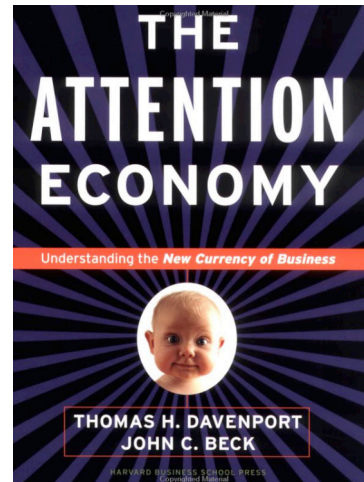
Business thinkers apparently are figuring out what athletes and other competitors have known all along: attention matters, and focus is the key competitive advantage. Leaders who fail to manage this precious resource do so at their own peril. Davenport and Beck write in *The Attention Economy*: “Today’s businesses are heading for disaster unless they can overcome the dangerously high attention deficits that threaten to cripple today’s workplace.”

As mentioned earlier, the authors cite “organizational ADD” as a symptom of this problem: increased likelihood of missing key information when making decisions, diminished time for reflection on anything but simple informational transactions, difficulty holding others’ attention, and decreased ability to focus when necessary. This book builds a compelling case for attention management. The authors continue:

Companies that succeed in the future will be those expert not in time management, but in attention management. Understanding and managing attention is now the single most important determinant of business success.

Learning Assets:

- *A New Perspective on Business*—by John Beck and Thomas Davenport (excerpted chapter of *The Attention Economy* book published by Harvard Business School Press)
- *Speech on Attention Management*—audio presentation by Rand Stagen (30 minutes)



TAKING A CLOSER LOOK

The Attention Economy builds an undeniable case that attention management is a critical area that businesses must begin to pay more attention to if they are to prosper in the new marketplace.

Davenport and Beck define attention as “focused mental engagement.” You can also think of attention as simply “focused awareness.”

Webster’s Dictionary defines attention as “The act or state of attending or heeding; the application of the mind to any sense object, representation, or thought. Focused awareness. Observant consideration; to notice. Close or careful observing or listening.”

Webster’s Thesaurus lists the following synonyms for attention: observation, regard, notice, mindfulness, listening, concentration, care, consideration, heedfulness, alertness, attentiveness, intentness, thoroughness, and awareness.



CAN'T PAY ATTENTION?

After years of incessant, mindless multitasking, many workers have literally lost their ability to concentrate. Concentration means doing one thing at a time. It is the polar opposite of multitasking. The article titled *Study: Multitasking Is Counterproductive* summarizes some of this research.

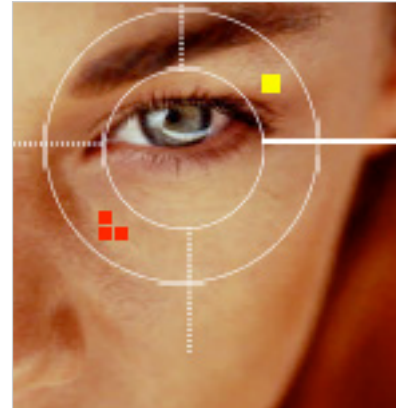
“But what’s wrong with multitasking?” you might ask. Well, according to research funded, in part, by the U.S. Office of Naval Research and published by the American Psychological Association, multitasking is completely counterproductive. Studies estimate that the average worker is 20 percent to 40 percent less productive when multitasking than when concentrating on doing one thing at a time.

CONCENTRATION IS THE KEY

Concentration is the ability to consciously control where attention is focused and to hold that focus for a period of time without being distracted by what is not relevant to the task at hand. The most universal of all human tools, concentration is important for every human endeavor. The productivity of just about any activity is enhanced through the ability to concentrate.

The ability to concentrate means that you’re in control of where your attention goes, rather than being at the whim of external distractions.

Being able to focus and concentrate does not mean that you cut yourself off from anything important or push anything away. It simply means that you are able to attend to exactly what is *appropriate* and let go of what is irrelevant to a given situation or activity. The ability to concentrate puts you in the driver’s seat.



To become a better attention manager, you first need to hone your focus and concentration skills.

TACTICS YOU CAN PUT INTO PRACTICE IMMEDIATELY

The Ten Time and Attention Management Tactics that follow provide specific methods to become more effective with both your time and your attention.

Integral Leadership Program participants, on average, reclaim five hours per week of productive time simply by applying these methods. Over the next 90 days, you will significantly boost your productivity and effectiveness by learning and implementing these ten tactics.

PART V: TEN TIME AND ATTENTION MANAGEMENT TACTICS

1. USE TIME BLOCKS

Multitasking is counterproductive largely because mentally switching gears wastes time, energy, and attention. And certain activities require a specific state of mind. Consider the different mind-sets necessary to be effective at different tasks. For example, the “performance state” (mind-set) you need to be in to analyze financial reports is very different from the one you need to be in to effectively coach/support your staff.

Therefore, you should group similar activities together. This puts you in the most productive performance state for each activity. And doing each activity for a block of time avoids the task switching that would slow you down or break your flow. Ideally, each activity should be done the same time each day, on the same days of the week. These groupings of similar activities are called “time blocks.”

Time Block Examples

Mon/Wed/Fri, 9 a.m. to 10 a.m.—Uninterrupted “focus” time to make key decisions and do strategic thinking/planning. Hold all calls, and close the door.

1. Schedule all or most of your meetings after lunch.
2. Use your mornings for office work, paperwork, and computer work.
3. Tue/Thu, 11 a.m. to noon—Research and reading time. Use this time to stay up on all your reading and research (such as reviewing websites).
4. Fridays are for planning and maintenance, including internal meetings. No client meetings on Fridays.



The key to making time blocks work is to honor them as much as you would honor appointments with important clients. You will be surprised at how quickly and easily your staff and clients “adjust” to your more routine schedule.

Learning Asset: *Creating Weekly Routine Time Blocks*—video clip (2 min)



2. DO THE WEEKLY FOCUSING PROCESS

Why do the Weekly Focusing Process? If you're like most Americans, when you closely inspect your professional and personal priorities, you'll find that some areas are being neglected. For example, you might be neglecting key work relationships, not making time to read industry publications or attend key industry conferences, failing to do long-term planning or strategic thinking, and rushing high-stakes decisions because you can't devote time to the thoughtful deliberation necessary to make a good decision.

Nothing is more crucial to your success than focusing on what is most important each week.

Yet if you don't make the time to plan your week and schedule the Proactive Zone items, you'll find yourself getting sucked into the Reactive Zone. Before that happens, commit 15 to 20 minutes before the week starts (Friday afternoon or over the weekend may work best) in order to get focused and plan the upcoming week.

Start by connecting with your mission or purpose and your core values and guiding principles. This "compass" provides important emotional context to the decisions and activities of your week and grounds you in what is really most important. Next, review your long-term vision and one-year vision (and related goals). Next, review your quarterly objectives—that is, the most important goals you are focusing on this quarter. Finally, review the strategic projects you are currently focusing on that need attention this week (to stay on track for your monthly and quarterly goals).

Once you identify these proactive activities, then schedule appointments in your calendar for the upcoming week. If you don't schedule the proactive activities at the start of the week, you'll get pulled into spending most of your time dealing with



things in the Reactive Zone. The purpose of the Weekly Focusing Process is to ensure that you focus on what is truly most important, every single week.

Reactive items (important and urgent) always tend to displace proactive items (important but not urgent). Therefore, many managers' and leaders' weeks fill up with reactive items, leaving no time for proactive items. The most important things are rarely the urgent things. Yet without a Weekly Focusing Process, people rarely get the most important things done.

Beyond the short-term gain in productivity and decrease in stress, the Weekly Focusing Process ensures that your one-year initiatives and long-term strategies are implemented successfully and in a timely fashion. This is critical for the accomplishment of your one-year vision and your long-term vision.

Learning Asset: *Weekly Focusing*—video clip (1 min)

3. SCHEDULE AND KEEP APPOINTMENTS WITH YOURSELF

You need to raise standards and clarify your boundaries in order to minimize distractions and become more proactive (and therefore more productive). This is where a little self-discipline comes in. The effectiveness of several of the tactics introduced in this section rely on your ability to schedule appointments with yourself—and then keep them.

You may be unfamiliar with the idea of scheduling solo appointments for things like project work, paperwork, reading, decision-making, strategic thinking, or creative time. But how else can you get these proactive items done if you do not schedule them?

You should consider appointments with yourself as important as appointments with your most valuable customer.

Do not hesitate to tell your coworkers, “I have to go now; I have an appointment,” even when it is an appointment with yourself.

When you conduct your Weekly Focusing Process, you will schedule an appointment for each of the key activities you are committing to doing that week (associated with your strategic projects and Quarterly Objectives).

If you fail to schedule appointment times to work on these proactive projects at the start of the week, then you will never get around to these important but not urgent items. They will be displaced by the many urgent and important tasks that arise and fill your time.

How does this happen? Imagine your weekly schedule as a bucket and your key proactive tasks as fist-sized rocks. Urgent and important tasks are like sand pouring into your bucket from all around you. If you put the big rocks (your proactive priorities) in your bucket first, you can pour the sand (reactive



tasks) in around them—but not vice versa. This is why you must schedule appointments with yourself ahead of time.

If you fail to effectively set and keep appointments with yourself, you will fail to get out of the Reactive Zone. The only way out of the Reactive Zone is to consistently fit your Proactive Zone tasks into your schedule, week after week. When you do this, the flow of Reactive Zone tasks will begin to shrink, because you will be getting “ahead of the game.”

Learning Asset: *Scheduling Appointments With Yourself*—video clip (2 min)



4. TURN OFF AUTOMATIC E-MAIL NOTIFICATION

This tactic and the next are technological solutions to one of the biggest problems managers face today. E-mail initially ushered in significant productivity enhancements. But now, due to people’s lack of training in its proper use, it erodes productivity as much as any other single factor in recent years. Note that email isn’t the problem—the misuse of it is. In fact, it has gone beyond a problem to become an addiction. When writing a proposal, reviewing a report (or trade journal article), or planning your calendar, do you feel compelled to read your incoming email the moment you are notified (perhaps as often as every 4 to 6 minutes)? If so, you may be an “email addict.”

Constant distraction kills productivity, and few things are more distracting than being notified every few minutes when email comes in.

To minimize these distractions and help you focus, switch off pop-up and sound notification, or turn your email program off altogether (periodically). Try reading and replying to email only several times a day (such as once in the morning, before lunch, after lunch, and in the afternoon). At the least, turn off automatic email notification permanently and shut down your email program when you are focusing on an important project—especially when you are in telephone conferences.

5. USE EMAIL FOLDERS AND FILTERS

Manually filing each email message you receive is a huge time waster. Your software can easily place each email message into a specified folder automatically while indicating the folders that contain “unread” messages. Rather than have all your email flow into one overwhelming in-box, set up individual folders for the major categories or types of email



you receive. Examples include management, marketing, sales, customers, family, newsletters, junk mail, etc. By having your correspondence grouped by types, you can focus your attention on one area/client/project at a time. You’ll find this to be less distracting, less stressful, and a lot more productive.

Once you have your folders set up, you can create email filters (called Rules in Microsoft Outlook) to automatically file incoming and outgoing email into specified folders. When new email comes into one of the folders (rather than your in-box), your software will highlight (or make bold) the name of the folder that has unread email and will indicate the number of unread messages in that folder. You will review the contents of high-priority folders several times a day but review the low-priority folders once a day or less (such as once a week).

You will be amazed at how less overwhelmed you will feel, plus you will save several hours a week that you formerly used to spend filing email (or searching for lost email). It takes only a small time investment to configure your filters and to update filters periodically as new people start emailing you. And the time you save—starting the very first week—easily offsets the small amount of time for set up.

Learning Asset: *How People Misuse Technology*—video clip (6 min)

6. STOP MULTITASKING AND START CONCENTRATING ON ONE THING AT A TIME

In 2001, CNN published a story titled *Study: Multitasking Is Counterproductive*.⁴ The story draws from an academic report on human perception and performance published by the American Psychological Association's *Journal of Experimental Psychology*. The director of the study, Joshua Rubinstein, Ph.D., formerly of the University of Michigan, is now with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The research was done at the University of Michigan and was partially funded by the Office of Naval Research.

Rubinstein and his associate David Meyer determined that for various types of tasks, test subjects lost a significant amount of time when they had to switch from one task to another. In other words, the more things people try to juggle at once (multitask), the more inefficient they become because of the time and attention lost when they mentally switch from one task/behavior/skill set to another. This idea of "task switching" was central to Rubinstein and Meyer's research conclusions.

Note that we are not saying you shouldn't have multiple, simultaneous projects going in a given week or month. Having multiple projects is not multitasking. Multitasking is doing multiple things in the same moment. Sue Shellenbarger writes in *The Wall Street Journal*, "A growing body of scientific research shows [that] one of the jugglers' favorite time-saving techniques, multitasking, can actually make you less efficient and, well, stupider. Trying to do two or three things at once or in quick succession can take longer overall than doing them one at a time, and [it] tends to leave you with reduced brainpower to perform each task."⁵

Current research also ties multitasking to chronic high stress and short-term memory loss. We therefore suggest that you concentrate exclusively on one project or one type of task for a minimum of 30 to 45 minutes (or longer) before moving on



to the next. Many workers today consider it to be perfectly normal to be simultaneously typing at the computer, answering the phone, interacting with coworkers, and thinking through important decisions. While this behavior may be appropriate for a switchboard operator or receptionist, this behavior is counterproductive—and frankly unprofessional—if being exhibited by an executive.

"Not being able to concentrate for, say, tens of minutes at a time may mean it's costing a company as much as 20 percent to 40 percent in terms of potential efficiency and productivity lost due to multitasking," Meyer says. Over a 45-hour workweek, that's 9 to 18 hours a week wasted.

Can you imagine what you could do with an extra 9 to 18 hours a week of productivity?

And that's just you. Multiply that number by the number of employees you have, and that's how many hours a week are wasted due to multitasking.

Obviously, in some situations, a certain amount of multitasking is unavoidable and even necessary. But the vast majority of multitasking that businesspeople engage in is unnecessary and extremely counterproductive.

So, what to do? The answer is simple to understand but challenging to consistently do well: Concentrate on doing one



thing at a time. To concentrate means to consciously attend to what is most relevant to a given situation or activity, without allowing yourself to be distracted.

***What do Michael Jordan,
Tiger Woods, and
Bill Gates have in common?***

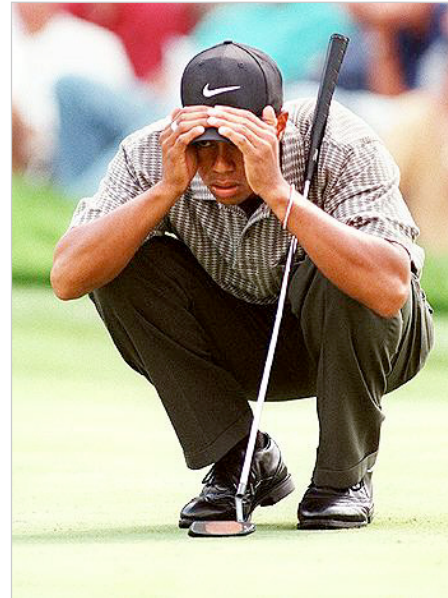
These people all have a highly developed ability to concentrate. This ability has many facets: single-pointed focus, mindfulness, a capacity to get into a “flow state” (also known as “the zone”). It is the same thing surgeons, fighter pilots, and most top artists, scientists, and leaders have in common.

The key is to bring all your attention, and therefore all of your intelligence, to whatever task you are doing at that moment. If you are committed to doing good work, then practice bringing 100 percent of your mind to what you are doing.

The opposite of this, of course, is dividing your attention in half by doing two things simultaneously. Multitasking turns us into half-wits.

Concentrating on one thing at a time is challenging for most people, especially since mindless multitasking is the norm in today’s “organizational ADD” business culture. But you can develop the habit of concentration with time, discipline and practice.

Remember that being fully focused not only unleashes your highest potential but also feels terrific. Perhaps you have noticed that the times when you have been the most productive, most effective, and most successful were the times when you were in the flow—powerfully absorbed and undistractable (think Tiger Woods charging up the back nine). Whether you achieve flow as you golf, write, negotiate a contract, lead a meeting under challenging conditions, or



close a big deal, flow is always an inherently rewarding experience.

But if you are like most people, you are somewhat inconsistent in your ability to get into that flow state. Grouping similar tasks together helps a lot.

Do computer work for an hour, and just computer work. Set a time each day, or several times a week, to do paperwork or reporting. Have certain times of day, or certain days, devoted to client meetings or staff meetings, and don’t try to do other things during that time. Of course, these are also examples of tactic number one (Time Blocks).

Learning Assets:

- *Study: Multitasking Is Counterproductive*—CNN article
- *Multitasking Makes You Stupid*—video clip (3 minutes)



7. CREATE A TIME BUDGET

Imagine the mess you would be in if you did not budget and track your finances. For most people, time is even more precious than capital. How can you invest your time wisely if you do not know how or where you are spending it? The place to start is a *time budget*.

To learn exactly where your time is going, track how you spend your time each day for a couple of weeks. You can do this by using the Time Budget tool provided on the Stagen website. This Excel spreadsheet already has seven categories of activities filled in to spark your thinking. Personalize these categories as necessary, and then start filling in how much time you spend daily in each category. At the end of each day, make some notes. At the end of the week, tabulate the results. The spreadsheet will do the math for you. This exercise will provide the data you need to make intelligent decisions on how to better budget your time. For example, you may choose to spend more time on sales, less time in meetings, less time with certain staff, more time with others, and/or more time on strategic planning.

Another thing you can practice is pruning your schedule — trimming activities, especially the less important or less beneficial ones. A rampant problem workers face today is chronic over-commitment. There will always be more work to

do than we have time to do it, and there will always be more things vying for our attention than we have attention to go around. Our schedules are like the bushes around a house. They need to be constantly pruned, or they will overrun the sidewalk. Unless you enjoy being overcommitted, missing deadlines, breaking promises, and generally letting people down (often the people you care about the most), you will need to become a practitioner of monthly pruning.

8. LOSE THE ELECTRONIC LEASH

Unless you are a doctor working in an emergency room, your personal communication devices (office phone, mobile phone, pager, and Instant Messenger) should not make you on call all the time. Get rid of this electronic leash by not allowing these tools to interrupt more important activities.

Switch off or mute personal communication devices when in important meetings, working on projects that require you to focus with undivided attention, or when with your family. Then simply check every hour or so to see if any urgent messages came through, and reply in your own time frame. Also, turn on *Instant Messenger* software only during certain hours a day or only when you are actively collaborating with team members. Otherwise, set it up to display an “I’m not available” message or switch it off.

The point is not to become unavailable or unresponsive to others, but rather to become fully available and responsive to your own consciously chosen priorities.

Learning Asset: *Lose the Electronic Leash*—video clip (2 min)



9. EDUCATE YOUR ENVIRONMENT

To increase your ability to focus and to decrease interruptions, consider having an open door policy only certain hours a day, and at other times inviting people to schedule an appointment to meet with you. If someone comes into your office during one of your concentration time blocks, set clear boundaries in a respectful way: “I want to give you my full, undivided attention. I’m available at 2 or 3 this afternoon; which time would work better for you?”

Consider closing your door a few hours a day to ensure quality uninterrupted time to focus on projects and meet with your staff. If your workspace doesn’t have a door, then hang a sign at the entry of your work area that says “Do Not Disturb” or something to that effect. Be creative—one Stagen Leadership Institute client hung yellow tape that read “Police Line—Do Not Cross.”

The amount of time your door is open vs. closed will depend on your corporate culture. Letting people know in advance why you close your door or requiring set appointments will help them understand that you are not trying to shut them out in any way.

In fact, your new policy is simply a better way to get the result that the open door policy was originally aiming at—enhanced communication, coordination, and productivity.

Setting clear boundaries, and therefore being undistracted when you meet, allows you to be more powerfully present with people. A related way of enhancing your effectiveness is to practice the fundamentals of active listening. Combine active listening with a single-focus time block for significant conversations. Not only will you end up being more productive in your contacts with people, you will also find that rather than resenting the modification of your open door



policy, they actually appreciate the time they spend with you more.

It is essential to educate the people in your work environment about what you are doing and why. This is especially true with this tactic because people may feel that you are trying to “close them out” and will need this objection addressed up front. Educating those in your environment is also essential for some of the other tactics to be sustainable since they require cooperation from your co-workers.

10. USE REAL-TIME COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVELY

Real-time communication (in-person meetings, phone conferences) is another word for *synchronous communication*—which means “at the same time” communication. Asynchronous communication (voice mail, email, fax, snail-mail) is that which is not at the same time.

Paying attention to the differences between these modes, and learning when to use which mode of communication, can help you reclaim several hours a week of productivity—in fact, you’ll save much more than that if your organization is badly misusing face-to-face meetings. You will also avoid the misunderstandings and conflicts that result from using the wrong kind of communication. (These avoidable conflicts are exactly the sort of thing that pull you into the Reactive Zone.)

REAL-TIME (SYNCHRONOUS)

Reserve real-time communication (whether on the phone or in person) for those times that you need to discuss complex or emotionally charged issues or make important decisions. In-person meetings are the most powerful—especially for building relationships—but also the most expensive. It is especially wasteful to use valuable synchronous meeting time for routine status reports and simple exchanges of data. Why tie up two or more peoples’ schedules for something that would be better handled through a simple email or fax? That is the purpose of asynchronous communication.

A typical manager spends half the workweek in meetings. Yet when polled, the vast majority of managers feel that a significant percentage of that time is wasted.

Following are four simple ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of your meetings:



1. Always start and end meetings on time.
2. Don’t use valuable face time for status reports.
3. Always have an agenda.
4. Try to keep meetings to one hour or less.

To avoid scattering your attention, make a habit of scheduling your phone meetings in advance as much as possible, and apply the above guidelines to them as well.

ASYNCHRONOUS COMMUNICATION

In many cases, it is sufficient and preferable for one person to convey an idea and then allow the other person or persons to respond later and at their convenience. Asynchronous communication is much less expensive in its use of human resources and should be used whenever appropriate to the task.



EMOTION

Because emotion is recognized and understood by seeing and/or hearing a person, any communication that has important emotional content should be conveyed in person or by phone (including voice mail). This way the feelings (such as praise, warmth, frustration, or discomfort) will come across accurately in voice tonality. Never use email to address emotional issues—it rarely is interpreted correctly and usually comes across more harshly than intended.

HYBRIDS

Instant Messenger is an interesting hybrid between asynchronous and synchronous modes of communication. In certain circumstances, Instant Messenger can be extremely effective. One example is when actively working with a remote team on a project in which you are all working both independently and collaboratively toward an impending deadline. However, this is one of only a few examples where Instant Messenger is helpful. In most cases, Instant Messenger detracts from productivity rather than enhancing it because it is misused and becomes a colossal distraction from the real work that needs to be accomplished.



PART VI: RESOURCES

LEARNING ASSETS

Articles

Is Your Job Giving You ADD?—by Brett Thomas and Paul Landraitis

Symptoms of Organizational ADD—by Brett Thomas and Paul Landraitis

Why We Need to Manage Attention—by Brett Thomas and Paul Landraitis

Time Wasters; Chronic Time Abuse—by Steven Burglas, in *Harvard Business Review*

Into the Zone—by Jay Tolson, cover story for July 3, 2000, *U.S. News & World Report*

A New Perspective on Business—by John Beck and Thomas Davenport, Harvard Business School Press

CNN Multitasking Study—by Porter Anderson

How to Run Effective Meetings by Timothy JohnPress

Firefighting by Knowledge Workers—white paper by Roger Bohn and Ramchandran Jaikumar

Historical and Contemporary Models of Attention Processes With Implications for Learning—by Bruce F. Dykeman in the journal *Education* (December 22, 1998)

Getting the Attention You Need—by John Beck and Thomas Davenport, in *Harvard Business Review*

Books

The Attention Economy: Understanding the New Currency of Business—by John Beck and Thomas Davenport

Timeshifting: Creating More Time to Enjoy Your Life—by Stephan Rechtschaffen, M.D.

Audio

Attention Management audio module

Speech on Attention Management—by Rand Stagen

Video

All video segments feature Rand Stagen and can be viewed via your www.Stagen.com class page:

- *Your Most Productive Day of the Year*
- *Focus Like Tiger, Concentrate Like Michael*
- *Three Simple Exercises to Enhance Focus*
- *You Must Be Present to Win*
- *The Weekly Focusing Process*
- *How People Misuse Technology*
- *Multitasking Makes You Stupid*
- *Creating Weekly Routine Time Blocks*
- *Scheduling Appointments With Yourself*
- *Lose the Electronic Leash*



PART VII: REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the four symptoms of organizational ADD? Which ones have you observed in your organization? Please describe.
2. What is meant by “continuous partial attention”? Give a personal example of this (yourself or someone you know).
3. What is meant by “trapped in the Reactive Zone?” How do people get trapped there? Give an example of a time that you were trapped in the Reactive Zone. Describe this experience.
4. What is the process or dynamic used to shrink the Reactive Zone?
5. What boundaries can you establish in your work environment to help minimize the Distraction Zone?
6. According to the University of Michigan study (funded by the U.S. Office of Naval Research), what is the percentage of waste associated with multitasking? How many hours a week is that estimated to be?
7. What is the difference between time blocks and setting appointments with yourself?
8. What do you need to do in order to close your door (or have “do not disturb” hours) without giving coworkers the wrong impression that you are shutting them out or are not being available to them?
9. Which kind of communication (synchronous or asynchronous) is best for expressing praise or disappointment with an employee? Which medium (in person, phone, email, or other) should be used? Contrast these two modes of communication by using examples from your own experience.
10. Which kind of communication (synchronous or asynchronous) should be used for data exchange, progress reports, and simple reporting? Which medium (in person, phone, email, or other) should be used? Explain.

ENDNOTES

¹ For a detailed analysis of Ken Wilber’s pioneering Four Quadrant Model as applied to all fields of natural science, social science, art, and morals, ambitious readers can refer to *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*. Several schools of thought refer to “integral theory” as a cross-disciplinary approach. However, calling something integral does not ensure that it is genuinely integrated. When Stagen documents refer to “integral” or “integrally informed” we are referring to Ken Wilber’s “AQAL Integral” platform. AQAL integral includes all quadrants, lines, levels (stages), states and types – in other words, it includes every known dimension in existence. Think of Ken Wilber’s AQAL integral as the “gold standard” of integral methodology. For additional background information on integral theory see the extensive works of Ken Wilber or visit www.IntegralUniversity.org.

² *The Attention Economy: Understanding the New Currency of Business* by Thomas Davenport and John Beck, published by Harvard Business School Press.

³ *Firefighting by Knowledge Workers*, white paper by Roger Bohn and Ramchandran Jaikumar, University of California.

⁴ This article is available on the Stagen Leadership Institute website.

⁵ *Multitasking Makes You Stupid* by Sue Shellenbarger, *The Wall Street Journal*, March 2003.