

Developing Focus

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Here is a handout for helping yourself or others develop focus, sometimes difficult to do in this Attention Deficit-inviting/Short Attention Span Theatre world of ours.

Follow your energy

One way to develop focus is to attend to and follow what energizes you. Discover what is compelling to you, what has natural energy and "juice." Spend as much time and energy as you can on these areas in your personal life and work.

As a previously scattered person, finding what I was blissed about (Milton Erickson's work) and angry about (the disrespectful and ineffective nature of much of psychotherapy) helped me focus my energy enough to write my first 15 books or so. I had so much energy, I could overcome much of my typical unfocused habit.

Develop your focus muscle

Just as when you exercise, doing a little bit more than you feel like doing or think you can do develops muscles, you can apply this principle to becoming more focused.

When you feel like jumping from one thing to another, get yourself to focus just a little longer than feels natural and help develop your "focus muscle."

Timelines/upcoming events

I read a story about a businessman who found that when he had a trip coming up, he focused and got a lot more done right before he left for a trip. He traveled quite frequently, so he told his secretary to book fake trips four times a year and let him know at the end of the day just before he would have left for the trip.

Use deadlines, timelines, and upcoming events to help you get focused. Then notice what you do to focus and determine whether you could use the same strategies to get focused other times.

Reminders/written notes

It's gotten more necessary as I have aged, but I find that writing myself notes that will get my attention naturally (for example, by the door just before I go out of the house or on my computer screen) helps me stay focused on tasks or activities.

Habits

This strategy uses your brain and body to help you stay focused. Once you develop a habit (like driving the same route to work each day, journaling every evening at the same time of night or running every morning), there is a natural tendency to stay in that groove without effort.

Develop habits of doing things you want to focus on and let that habit create a natural focus for you.

Your own quirky patterns of focusing

I discovered through some experimentation that I could focus much more on writing my books when I listened to loud music while writing. Others have been appalled at this, wondering how it could help me focus, but it does. Still others have nodded their heads, having discovered the same thing about themselves.

What have you discovered, as weird as it may seem to others, that has helped you focus in the past? Try experimenting with that or some variation on that to help you focus when you are having difficulty staying or getting focused.

A support person can help focus

When I have to clean up my piles of disorganized stuff, I have to have another person around to help me stay focused and persist, I have discovered. Otherwise, I get distracted and wander off to other (less frustrating and more fun) tasks.

Consider temporarily using a friend or hiring a support person to help you stay focused on some important tasks or activities.

Medications

I'm not much on medications, but if I had tried the other strategies here and any others I could come up with, I would seriously consider getting some pharmacological help to focus. You might be able to use medications only on the occasions you need to focus and not necessarily for the long run.