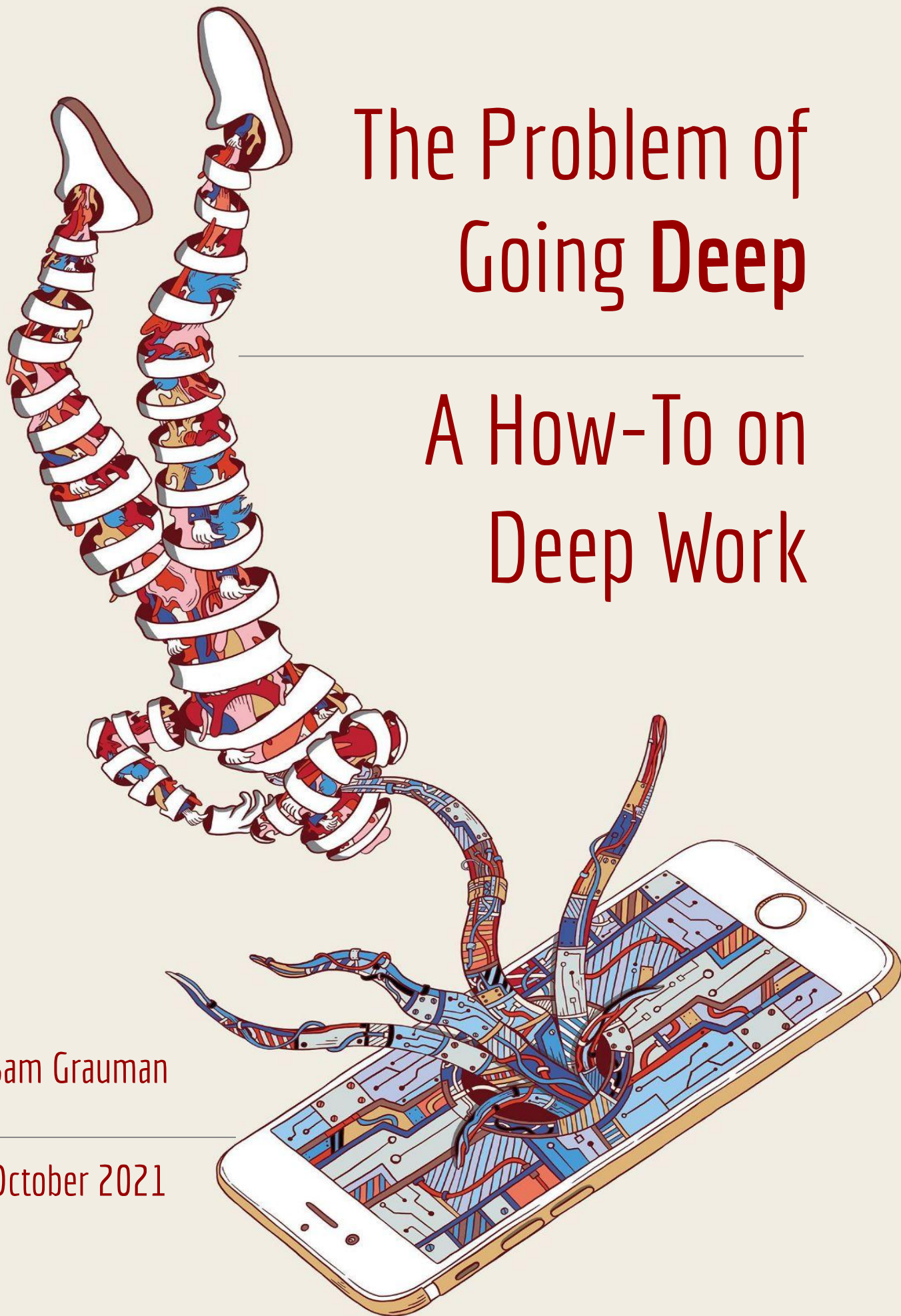


The Problem of Going Deep

A How-To on Deep Work

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The Problem of Going Deep ; A How-To on Deep Work

Executive Summary

As technology continues to dominate our head space, we have become more susceptible to distractions. Many people do not realize how addicted they have become to their smartphones. It is genuinely challenging to escape the smartphone addiction our society promotes so conclusively, and it has affected our lives in ways we could never imagine. We do everything with our phones in our pockets or in our hands. Our phones create distractions so when we watch tv, we become distracted, when we do work, we become distracted. Distractions have a detrimental effect on our brain's focus and limits the amount of concentration we can put into our work. Removing distractions from your workplace will return a higher quality of work, and you will become more satisfied at the end of the day.

Tech Developers have admitted to creating algorithms to infect your brain and keep you coming back. They call this, 'Brain Hacking'. You could imagine that your phone is constantly screaming for your attention, similar to a hungry baby. We feed into the demands our phones create, spending more time on our phones so tech companies can grab more money and power from its users.

In order to step away from your distractions and elevate your work to a new level, you must be determined and dedicated to improvement. We can unlock higher levels of thinking and productivity by removing distractions from our workplace. From using the art of 'Flow', to complete and utter 'Deep Work', we can keep distractions away from our work, and improve our quality of work and quality of life.



The Dilemma

70% Tablet-owning households with children under 12 who say kids use the device

How do Children Use Tablets?

According to Tablet-Owning Adults with Children

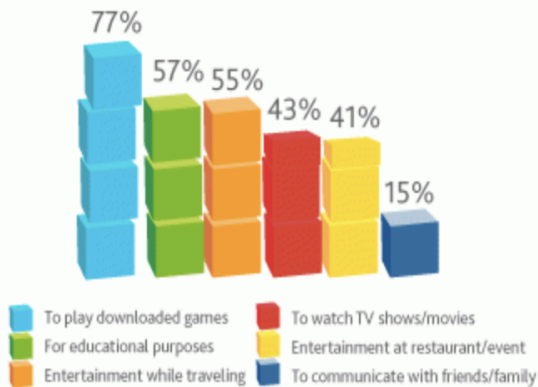


Image Source: Nielsen, Q4 2011

It is imperative to human nature that we learn as we live. From the moment we are born our brains act like a sponge to the outside world, soaking in all the light, color, and sound in the surrounding environment becomes second nature to us. Most mammals are fully developed in a year or two after their birth, while humans are stuck soaking up life for another fifteen to twenty years.

In today's society much of this 'soaking up sponge' phase is composed of ipads, computers, and smartphones. Parenting.com recently reported on surveys conducted by Nielsen that many parents use ipads as babysitters, and that 55 percent of families use tablets to keep their "kiddos quiet in the backseat"(Parenting). At such a young age children are already creating addictive habits on tablets, and they lose some of the potential soaked up knowledge of the real world. As we continue to navigate ourselves through the scientific society we rely more and more on new technology to communicate and express ourselves. Shoving iPads to distract our children is just an example of how sewn into society technology has become already.

The rise in smartphone activity in children has been linked to the extreme rise in ADHD and ADD, something I myself was diagnosed with in highschool. When my psychiatrist discussed my results to my parents and I, she mentioned some of the reasons why it is becoming more prevalent in today's youth. She said that technology creates such sustained immediate stimulation in your brain throughout your development that you rely on it. This can eventually rot your brain's attention span and may even be severe enough to cause ADD or ADHD. WebMD even stated that the rise in ADD and ADHD could be linked to the fact that young people "are drawn to digital media because they seek out stimulation... digital media exposure could increase risk for ADHD"(WebMD). As a parent, if you rely on your iPad to keep your 'kiddos quiet in the back' from a young age, you should be aware that somewhere down the line it could yield adverse effects. It is no question that our attention spans are shortening; the cause is clear and the evidence is everywhere.

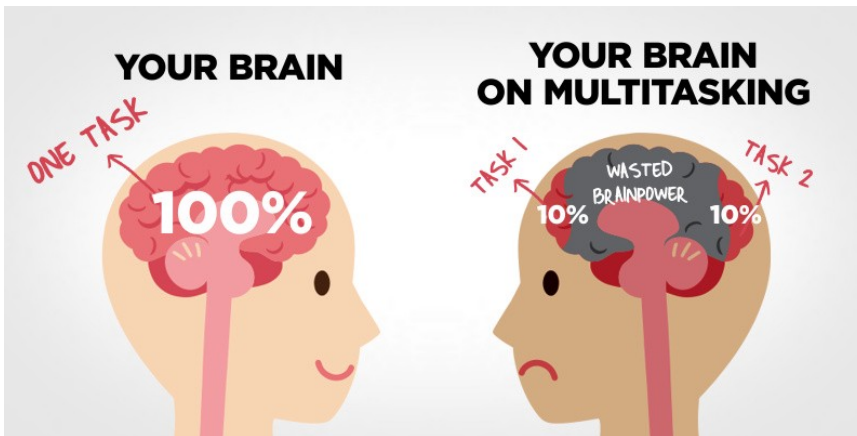


Image Source : Creativeventures

In Cal Newport's, *Deep Work*, Newport describes our brain as having limited willpower. When we focus on multiple things at once, like studying with the television on, your brain splits its limited willpower and completes each task at a split capacity, rather than having one hundred percent of your brain's willpower working on one thing at a time. In turn, this causes the result of retaining knowledge from studying worse, as well as understanding the television show. Newport describes this type of work 'Shallow Work'. It is something we should not strive for. In retaliation against 'Shallow Work', Newport suggests practicing 'Deep Work';

Deep work is "professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit" (Newport 3). Deep work practices can help you create valuable and unique products that shallow work often fails to replicate. Today, distractions are unavoidable and causing a shallow work epidemic. We must escape the prison of distractions we are trapped in and project ourselves and our societies forward with higher quality work.

Details, Details, Details

Throughout high school I played a lot of video games in my freetime, and actually created what still is the world's best clan in a popular mobile phone game. I wrote about my experiences creating this clan and it helped me get accepted into colleges because my grades were less than par. Video games were an outlet I used to escape school. I was always distracted when I did anything school related but when I was gaming, I honed my focus and put all of my brain's potential into it at once. Reflecting on this time, I can say that this was my first experience with the flow state.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is famous for pioneering our knowledge of the valuable 'flow state'. Csikszentmihalyi describes, "the best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile" (Csikszentmihalyi). A definition eerily similar to Newport's definition of 'Deep Work', and for good reason. Both of these knowledge workers are drawing from the same tactics to support their beliefs. The

clear difference between the two I have come to recognize is that 'Flow' is more in tune with your abilities and doing what you're already confident at meditatively, while Deep Work is reaching a certain threshold of focus to tap into the deepest crevices of your mind actively. You could think of flow as more passive, and deep work as a more active mental state.

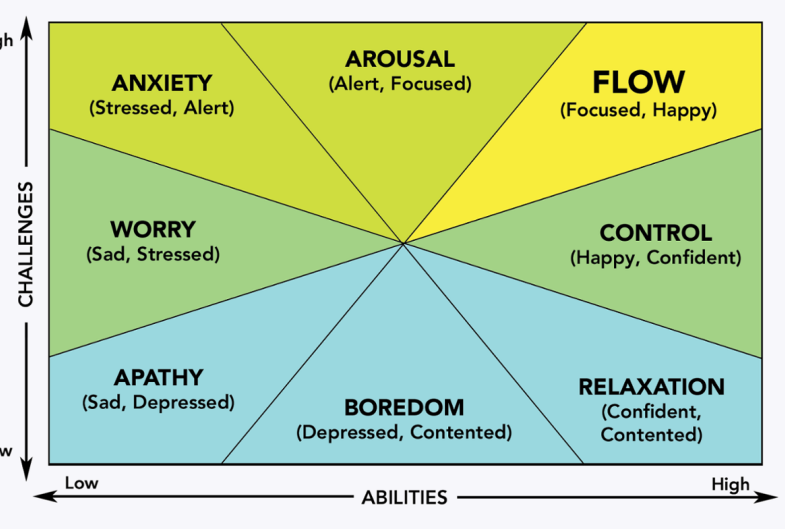


Image Source : Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's Model of Flow

The art of 'Flow' has been redefined many times, and has been in human philosophies for thousands of years. Its history can be traced back to ancient China, through ancient Taoist beliefs. Csikszentmihalyi has rebranded this historical belief as Flow. Csikszentmihalyi's model of flow shows that you can achieve flow only when you are confident, comfortable, alert, and focused. You have to want to work. If you have distractions you will not be focused, if you are inexperienced you will not be confident. Flow is a delicate state of being and can be difficult to achieve, and easy to fall out of.

Learning and experiencing the flow state is intrinsic to truly understanding the meaning behind Newport's 'Deep Work'. Flow is a predecessor to achieving 'Deep Work' and you will notice many congruences between the two. Everything needed to achieve the flow state will also be found in achieving deep work; everything earned from the flow state will also be earned through deep work. Flow can do so much more than elevate your work quality, it can also be linked to happiness. Newport stated that "the more such flow experiences that occur in a given week, the higher the subject's life satisfaction. Human beings, it seems, are at their best when immersed deeply in something challenging" (Newport 84). This may be why Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi states :

Ironically, jobs are actually easier to enjoy than free time, because like flow activities they have built-in goals, feedback rules, and challenges, all of which encourage one to become involved in one's work, to concentrate and lose oneself in it. Free time, on the other hand, is unstructured, and requires much greater effort to be shaped into something that can be enjoyed

After being familiar with the flow state you should understand the immense value it can give to you. Deep work is just a more immersed and active level of flow, but it relies on the same abilities to achieve. Deep work should be a goal not only because of its value to your work, but because of its value to you. Deep work creates meaningful and unique instances that could not be replicated in other ways to both your work and yourself. Humans

Flow is a combination of Confidence and Arousal; It is the opposite of Boredom and Worry

grow most in times of hardship, and as we said before, “are at their best when immersed deeply in something challenging”(84). We learn the most about our environments and ourselves when we are challenged.

Dedicate To Start



The flow states many benefits should not be understated. It is one of the many superpowers that comes with being human. You are probably more familiar with experiencing flow than you know. If you have ever heard the phrase *time flies while you're having fun*, that would be an example of being in the flow state. Your understanding of time falls before your feet and you are completely and utterly in the moment. Before you know it, six hours have gone by and you have built a giant sandcastle with your friends. This is one of the great things about flow. It can be applied to anything you love to do. People have written extensive books about being in the flow state during tennis, writing, art, and even meditation in itself. It is simply the act of concentrating deeply and dedicatedly on something you are confident in. This is why dedication towards your work is completely vital to improving your quality.

Dedication has been labeled the “ultimate key to success in life”(thriveglobal) by thrive global, and is the secret ingredient to achieving deep work. Dedication is absolutely essential in achieving deep work because you have to want to improve, and you need to push yourself to work more productively. Once you dedicate yourself to something, your mindset instantly changes and you will recognize your goals differently. No famous scientist, or writer you have ever heard of was not dedicated to their work. Every single one of them believed in what they were doing, and had some dedication and motive for doing it.

Cal Newport offers a genius method to start on your journey of achieving dedicated deep work. He calls it “The Rhythmic Philosophy of Deep Work Scheduling”

The Rhythmic Philosophy of Deep Work Scheduling argues “that the easiest way to consistently start deep work sessions is to transform them into a simple regular habit”(Newport 111). The sheer act of scheduling time for yourself, dedicated to working deep is going to change the quality of your work and productivity. Dedicating time for your work will result in a deeper mindset while working, you will have a much easier time starting



your work because it is already scheduled and habitual, and you will eventually be conditioned to working deeply in that time, so you will become more immersed quicker when you are working. This deeper mental state will elevate your mind, and you will become more creative in your methods, and become more confident in your work.

Minute Maid said it best,
Put Good in Get Good Out

You will notice that scheduling deep work sessions regularly will improve both your work ethic and your work. Newport states that overtime, you should even notice yourself becoming better at what you do quicker. For example, imagine a student who has started coding and is just trying to pass the class. They are going to have a very hard time learning the basics if they are not focused and dedicated to it. Compare this with a student who is dedicated and wants to succeed. This student is going to study harder, and more productively. This is going to result in them learning the foundations quicker and more effectively than the shallow worker. Hard things will become easier and faster compared to the other student, and this will propel their understanding of code, all because they were dedicated. The deep working student is going to be happier at the end of the day because they succeeded in their goals, and were able to extract greater value from their mind throughout the day.

If you can *never* find the willpower to dedicate yourself, you will *always* fail in reaching your true potential.

Dump Distractions

As Modern technology advances, its algorithms and features absorb more pockets of our lives. Through advancements, the phone has become the greatest multi-tool of all time. Need an alarm clock, or a flashlight, or maybe a computer, or how about a calculator? Never in history has one item that fits in the palm of your hand been so versatile. The sheer volume of versatility our phones have keeps us coming back for new reasons. You can do anything from banking to having a social life, all on your phone. Its capabilities are near limitless, and we rely on them in almost every situation.

Grabbing your phone every time you feel distressed or bored, our brain gets a small release of dopamine. Overtime, grabbing your phone is going to become habitual, and you'll literally get withdrawals without it. Ooma



reported on the first sixty minutes without your phone, and found clear stages phone addicts will go through when their phones are gone.

First 10 minutes:

- Drop in Cognitive performance during tests and meetings
- 51% reported “Extreme tech anxiety”
- Acute stress similar to ‘fight or flight’

After 30 minutes:

- Anxiety increase for heavy phone users
- Boredom from being without media
- Confusion and disorientation

After 60 minutes:

- Acknowledgment of addiction after suffering physical withdrawal symptoms
- In just an hour, Dramatic range of physiological and psychological symptoms are demonstrated

Ooma’s goal was to show how intertwined our phones are with our lives, and what may happen if they are taken away. They successfully show its withdrawal symptoms and suggest that you should attempt to force yourself to be away from your phone for an hour to notice the symptoms in yourself, it may be enlightening!

Stepping away from your phone to concentrate on work is easier said than done. When I immerse myself into my work I often struggle to stay off my phone for an extended period of time. In Cal Newport’s, *Deep Work*, Newport states that “Internet use is synonymous with seeking distracting stimuli”(Newport 161). There are steps you can take to combat distracting yourself constantly. Newport suggests “Instead of scheduling the occasional break from distraction so you can focus, you should instead schedule the occasional break from focus to give in to distraction”(161). This is definitely ambitious for someone who is a heavy phone user, but it’s core ideas should be replicated. Newport suggests putting your phone’s distracting capabilities as a reward system so that you do not find yourself

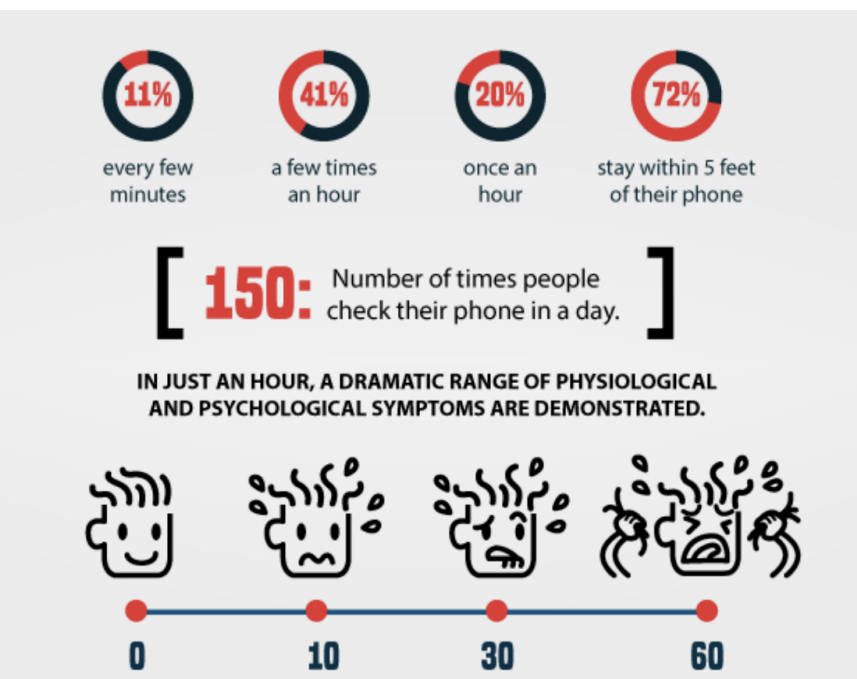
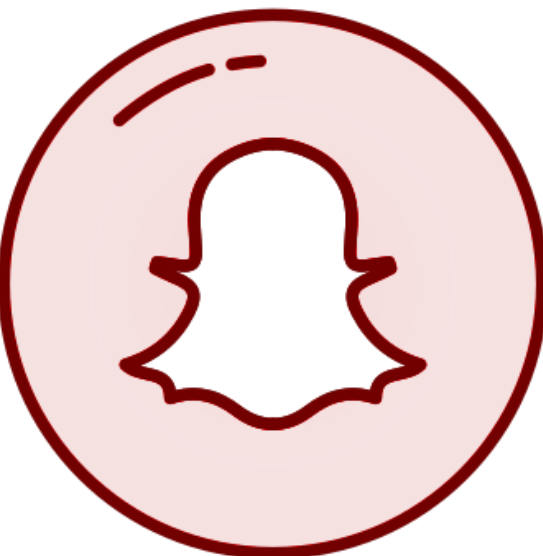


Image Source : Ooma

mindlessly scrolling, and are more productive throughout the day.

Removing distractions completely is no cake walk. It will take practice and thoughtful dedication to become someone who does not cave into distractions at all. Newport says to be successful in getting rid of distractions from work, “you must rewire your brain to be comfortable resisting distracting stimuli”(165). His example of using distractions as a reward system would rewire your brain to maximize productivity.



Anderson Cooper reported on the idea of “Brain Hacking”. An idea that tech companies are creating complex algorithms to force habits into you. A perfect example of brain hacking we are all familiar with, is Snapchat Streaks. The interviewee, Tristan Harris states that tech companies will do whatever they need to do to make their money. Harris says to these tech companies, “whether they want to or not, they are shaping the thoughts and feelings and actions of people. They are programming people”(Harris). Harris has a background in programming and has seen the effects of Brain Hacking first hand. Just recently, Facebook was recently accused of ‘Brain Hacking’ its users after a Whistleblower released studies Facebook had conducted on their own systems, and finding that their content algorithms cause their engagement to rise at the cost of its users' mental and physical health. Facebook even found this to be especially true for teenage girls. This is frightening evidence against technology being neutral. Facebook’s goal is ‘Brain Hacking’ its users because that’s how Facebook makes more money.

Something that has helped me become less of a puppet to my notifications has been giving myself a dedicated time and space to work deeply. Until I got to college, I had never had a desk in my room and would typically do work in bed or on the kitchen counter. Once I got my Quinnipiac sponsored desk, I knew that was going to be the workspace I would conquer my first college papers on. After a few trips to my desk I noticed my work improve, as well as my attitude towards it. It became habitual and easy to get into my work mode, all because I had a dedicated space to work.

Cal Newport agrees that having a dedicated space for you to work deep can make the difference you are looking for. In the introduction, Newport shares the story of Psychologist, Carl Jung, who built his own retreat away from society, to claim a place of peace and quiet where Jung could think his deepest. He built his cabin away from his professional life as a professor, “not to escape his professional life, but instead to advance it”(Newport 2). Jung set out to advance our understanding of psychology and achieved just that. He is now remembered as one of the most influential Psychologists of the 20th century. In one of the later chapters of Deep Work, Newport goes into detail once again about Jung, and states :

It’s not the amenities of the cabins that generate their value; it’s instead the grand gesture represented

in the design and building of the cabin for the sole purpose of enabling better writing

This is crucial to understand. Pimping out your desk with RGB LEDs, the most expensive computer at BestBuy, and a high quality desk chair is not going to be what makes your work improve. It is going to be you, your mindset, and your dedication that will improve your work. Having a space for your brain to acclimate to will make it easier for you, and it is going to put you on a more reliable path to improve.

If you are still having trouble getting immersed into your work even though you have a desk and have tried staying off your phone, do not be scared to take it to new levels. An irresistible notification can be detrimental to your work if you do not check it; once you check it you get absorbed into the distractions on your phone pulling you in. If you find yourself struggling to not think about your phone just put it on a charger in another room, or put it away out of your sight. Do not give it the opportunity to grab your attention in the first place.

Out of sight, out of mind.



The Denouement

The evidence is clear. Removing distractions from your workplace will improve your quality of work. This argument is especially important and relevant as more people are working from home than ever before. Home is a place for comfort and ease and adding work into the mix can certainly be challenging. Distractions flourish at home so we cave into them easier and more often. Working without any distractions has proven to yield better results and doing this is becoming more challenging as more work from home, and smartphones become more of a multi-tool every day. That is why it is especially important to get a space dedicated to working diligently. Create habits that work for you, and break habits that do not.

If you want to excel at your work, and improve on yourself, removing distractions, especially from social media, is especially important. Social Media creates a lot of opportunity for a lucky few; becoming one of those lucky few still takes hard work and determination. Paving your own way is going to take a distraction free environment. Put your phone down, or set restrictions on some addicting apps if you can't find the willpower to. At the bottom line, removing your pointless distractions is going to elevate you and your work by letting your brain focus and saturate more knowledge. By putting your brain through something challenging and comprehensive, you're going to be happier with yourself and your day to day life. It is only going to improve you.

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