

Clear the Mental Clutter

By Dianna Booher

Whether you're overwhelmed by unfocused mental activity, have become sidetracked by emotional concerns, or simply want to improve your intellectual performance, consider these tips to help you think, work, and feel better.

Plan Worry Time

When you catch your mind wandering into worry, postpone the thoughts until later. Schedule yourself a time to think about that worry; jot it down if you must, with titles like: "What to do about...."

Sort your worries into those that are real and those that may never happen. For those that may never happen, promise to worry about them only when and if they happen. To lessen the anxiety during the waiting time, use the old principle: "What's the worst thing that can happen to me?" "Will I survive?" "How will I cope?"

For real worries, outline steps to prevent the situation, correct the problem, or minimize the impact. Then take action toward a resolution.

Resolve Ongoing Conflict with Others

When we find ourselves in conflict with another person, we have four choices. The issue is deciding on the most expedient choice for any particular situation.

- Accommodate (give in to the other person)
- Compromise (give up some of your goals or wants)
- Overpower (insist on your way, even if angering the other person)
- Resolve the issue (develop new alternatives so that both of you still reach your goals and feel good about the situation)

On occasion, any of these actions or reactions are appropriate. Choose the best action or reaction. Then let go of the situation. You can choose how to handle conflict. If you don't like past choices, choose differently.

Refuse to Overcommit Yourself

If you're tempted to take on more than you can realistically handle, ask yourself these two questions: "Does this activity fit my goals and values?" "Why am I being asked to do this task—because no one else has the expertise, or because no one else will say 'yes'?" If you don't like the answers to these questions, pass up the "opportunity."

If you have difficulty getting "no" out of your mouth when someone seems to have a real need and a good cause, think of the "no" in a positive way: Focus the conversation on what you have decided to commit to rather than on what you have decided not to commit to.

Concentrate; Don't Invite Interruptions

You may be unintentionally inviting interruptions that break your concentration. Even an amused facial expression will lure people to your desk to strike up a conversation. Do you have "toys" and gadgets on your desk that people feel compelled to touch as they pass? Do you keep several projects within sight on your desk so that you're tempted to go from one to the other randomly? Do you stop to take calls while you're trying to do creative work? Do you ask other people for opinions and then think about your rebuttal rather than listen to their response? Contrary to what many people claim, you cannot do two things at once as well as concentrating on one task until it's complete.

Create a Mental Oasis for Creative Thinking/Work

Albert Einstein once said that "Imagination is more important than knowledge." However, you cannot write the Great American Movie, your annual "accomplishment" report, or a \$10 million client proposal without thinking space. For your creative projects, find a non-routine environment.

Go to a cabin or resort in the mountains or rent a hotel room. Even closer, less exotic places will do: your backyard patio, the conference room down the hall, a friend's office, the neighborhood park, or the library. The idea is to see different scenery so that routine tasks and paperwork can't nag at you from the corner of your eye.

Move from Left-Brain to Right-Brain Activities

Left-brain activities include tasks such as fact-gathering, reading technical information, writing a report. Right-brain activities include creating visuals to use in a presentation, giving constructive feedback to a boss, planning a marketing strategy to win over a prospective client.

Most of us have a preference for one brain dominance. Striking a balance between both kinds of activities can produce the most creative results and satisfying emotion, not to mention increased energy and motivation.

Think Rationally

Are the goals, pace, and schedules you've set for yourself reasonable? Even possible? Make an accurate assessment of what you can do, and download or postpone the rest. Keeping unaccomplishable duties dangling in front of you will ensure that you never feel the satisfaction of accomplishment and always feel the frustration of being overwhelmed.

When the mental clutter spinning around your head prevents you from working or thinking effectively, remember these tips. Ridding yourself of emotional, irrational, and even legitimate distractions will help you bypass mental roadblocks to achieve maximum productivity.

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***Dianna Booher** works with organizations to increase their productivity and effectiveness through better oral, written, interpersonal, and cross-functional communication. She is a keynote speaker and the author of more than 40 books (22 on communication) including The Voice of Authority, Booher's Rules of Business Grammar, Speak with Confidence, and Communicate with Confidence. Dianna is CEO of **Booher Consultants**, a communication training firm offering programs in presentations skills, business writing, and interpersonal communication. Successful Meetings Magazine named her to its list of "21 Top Speakers for the 21st Century." Executive Excellence Publishing also named Dianna to its "Top 100 Thought Leaders" and "Top 100 Minds on Personal Development." www.booher.com or call 800.342.6621.*

For more tips on conflict resolution, see Communicate with Confidence: How to Say It Right the First Time and Every Time (McGraw-Hill) by Dianna Booher.