

# Make every minute count and become undistractable during difficult times...

Practical tools and habits to maintain productivity, improve focus and increase adaptability

Effectively using your time is more important during challenging times

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This article is the second in a series that considers **10 Habits of Highly Productive People** and explores how to adjust your old habits to create new ones that will serve you better in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We all have to work and live differently now and it's critical to consider how to thrive in these difficult times. The current global situation is a human and economic tragedy, the likes of which we haven't seen since the World Wars. It could have impacts that are orders of magnitude greater than combining the Great Depression and the Spanish Flu pandemic.

So how do we become undistractable and carefully select where we invest our time?

Let's turn our thoughts to how we can adopt new ways of thinking and working. It would be amazing if we can carry forward some of the positive changes that can come of these incredibly challenging times. Professionals who are fortunate enough to still have jobs find themselves working in radically new and unexpected ways. Some are working from home and delivering virtual services for the first time; others are working from home surrounded by young families who are completing their learning online.

## Understanding the buzz words

Let's start with some definitions to establish context and provide anchors of meaning.

### Multi-tasking

- the performance of more than one task at the same time.
- the execution by a computer of more than one program or task simultaneously.

### Concentration

- the action or power of focusing all one's attention.

### Prioritisation

- the action or process of deciding the relative importance or urgency of a thing or things.

*Distraction prevents us from achieving our goals, becoming undistractable requires the formulation of habits that enable us to concentrate amid life's many distractions.*



## Distraction

- a thing that prevents someone from concentrating on something else.  
synonyms: diversion · interruption · disturbance · intrusion · interference · obstruction · hindrance
- a diversion or recreation.  
synonyms: amusement · entertainment · diversion · activity · pastime · recreation · interest · hobby · game · leisure pursuit · occupation · divertissement
- extreme agitation of the mind.

Definitions from Lexicon, powered by Oxford

## Indistractable

- the ability to give yourself fully to each activity and maintain focus
- this is a new term first used by Nir Eyal in his book "indistractable - How to Control Your Attention and Choose Your Life", Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019

Definition courtesy of Therese Linton, 2020

The ability to be indistractable is critical as we find ourselves working and living in vastly different conditions. Many of us are now working from home with our partners, children and pets, so how do we concentrate so we maintain our productivity and retain our jobs (for those of us who still have them) or develop new skills (for those of us who don't right now).

*The ability to be indistractable is more important now than ever before and will provide an absolute competitive advantage in both the current working environment and moving forward into the future once the pandemic has passed.*

## Does multi-tasking really work?

For decades the ability to multi-task was lauded as a desirable trait and thought to contribute to enhanced productivity. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the first citation of the word is from 1966 in Datamation magazine. At that time it related to the ability of a Central Processing Unit in a computer to simultaneously process two or more actions. The more general use of the term began in the 1990s when it transformed into popular use as the ability of a person to perform several tasks as once.

Multi-tasking involves engaging in two tasks simultaneously. Psychotherapists and researchers in the field know this is only possible when one task is automatic and when both tasks use different areas of the brain. "For example, you can read effectively while listening to classical music because reading comprehension and processing instrumental music engage different parts of the brain. However, your ability to retain information while reading and listening to music with lyrics declines significantly because both tasks activate the language center of the brain." Jim Taylor Ph.D, posted on [Psychology Today](#), 30 March 2011

Jim Taylor's view in the article above is that most multi-taskers are actually serial-tasking, as they are quickly shifting between two tasks rather than engaging in both tasks simultaneously.

Research indicates that multi-tasking is neither effective, nor efficient, due to the lag time between the transition from one task to another.

*Complex tasks can take up to 40% longer when you multi-task as opposed to concentrating on one task at a time.*

***WOW – STOP MULTI-TASKING NOW!***

If that isn't enough to convince you then here are some excellent resources, articles and research papers about the negative impacts of multi-tasking available from the American Psychological Association - [multi-tasking research and articles](#) search results 10 April 2020.

## Good productivity habits

I developed this list of the 10 habits of highly effective people as part of the work I do as a productivity coach, although I do think of myself as an accidental productivity coach. As an expert in Legal Project Management and Legal Process Improvement, I am surprised by how many lawyers I work with don't have the basic foundations of good working habits and personal productivity. I found myself unexpectedly coaching many of them in how to set up good productivity habits and sharing tools that I had been using and refining over decades in the corporate world as an extremely successful project manager and academic.

I covered habits 1 and 2 in the first article in this series, in this article I focus on habits 3 through 7. Here are all 10 habits for you again.

### 10 habits of highly productivity people

1. Be disciplined about the basics
2. Maintain a healthy body and positive mind
3. Ruthlessly prioritise
4. Focus on what is important, remove the unimportant
5. Allocate time for the important things
6. Use every minute
7. Allocate time for rest and rejuvenation
8. Get in the zone and stay in the zone
9. Create the right environment
10. Good enough is good enough

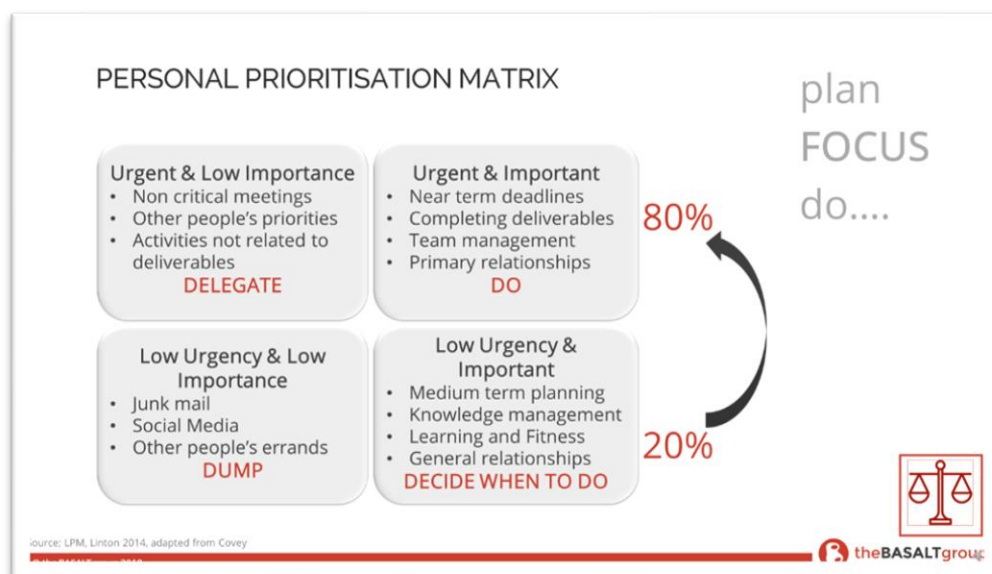
## Determining your priorities

**A critical precursor to becoming indistractable is to first determine your priorities.**

**Ruthlessly prioritise** – if you are clear about your goals and priorities; the reason that you wish to focus on these priorities; and have detailed plans to achieve your desired goals: then you have the basis for improving your focus and super charging your productivity. It's impossible to prioritise effectively if you're vague about your goals. There are many great goal setting frameworks out there, here are my short cuts to goal setting –

1. **Identify the outcomes you wish to achieve in the key domains of your life.** Nir Eyal considered 3 core life domains – You (or Self), Relationships and Work. I prefer to expand on this list and regularly mind map my broad outcomes in the domains of – Health, Leisure, Home, Relationships, Work.
2. **Consider the primary purpose behind each goal** – this step ensures alignment to your values and interests. Goals that are purpose driven and values aligned gain traction more quickly than goals that are wholly materialistic or designed to impress others.
3. **Create a team and delegate** – consider if you need to undertake all the actions towards your goals yourself. You can get more done if you have a team and everyone is clear about their accountabilities, as well as how their component fits into the bigger picture. You'll also have more time for the most important actions and be able to make more effective prioritisation decisions.

**Focus on what is important, remove the unimportant** - the personal prioritisation matrix is one of my favourite tools for getting organised, maintaining focus and setting yourself free! It's my tailored, personal version that's been adapted from Stephen Covey's matrix that first appeared in his book 'Seven Habits of Highly Effective People' published in 1989. Sometimes oldies are goodies.



**Allocate time for the important things** - I recommend a simple discipline of allocating 20% of your time on a daily, or weekly basis, to those activities or objectives that are important and not urgent – these are often the most strategic activities and therefore the most important in the long run! Consider the Low Urgency and Low Importance quadrant - these are the time wasters and you just shouldn't do them at all, unless you need a super quick mental break. Lastly, consider the Urgent and Low Importance quadrant - these are activities that you shouldn't do, they might be someone else's priorities and not yours and it might be feasible to delegate them to someone else.

**Use every minute** - time boxing is one of the most versatile and unfortunately under-utilised personal productivity techniques. It can be used to allocate increments of time to almost any activity. I generally recommend time boxes of no less than 30 minutes and no more than 90 minutes. Be aware of your preferences and work patterns when allocating time boxes. You may prefer to do all your meetings in the afternoon and focus on the production of complex deliverables in the morning, or you may be a night owl or an early bird. You might prefer meetings and administration during the day so that you can concentrate on high value activities in the early evening or early morning.

## Applications for our current situation

The ability to be undistractable is more important than ever as we find ourselves working and living in vastly different conditions. Many of us are now working from home with our partners, children and pets, so how do we concentrate so we can maintain our productivity. Be flexible as you apply the tools and techniques above to understand the new cadence of your life and then prioritise and allocate time boxes accordingly.

Some old goals are no longer relevant and these need to be replaced by new goals - your day might look different as you supervise schooling, so you can get up early to exercise and then stay up late catching up on work so you can focus on your kids during the day. Some of your new goals might be related to how to deliver differently and retain your job retain our jobs (for those of us who still have them), or perhaps you now have more time as you're not commuting anymore, you could use this time to develop new skills.

*Whatever you do now and however you do it – do ONE thing at a time and give it your undivided attention, be undistractable.*

There's no need to wait until you have plenty of time, you can make amazing progress with just 5 minutes of pure concentration, so don't put things off because you don't think you have enough time to finish something right now. Get started, prepare and plan and then you will progress more quickly when you come back later.

*Don't make excuses and don't procrastinate, if something is worth doing then it's worth doing NOW.*



## About the author...



This article was written by Therese Linton, Founder and Principal Consultant of The BASALT Group® encompassing The Positive Lawyer® and the Academy of Legal Leadership®. She is a global leader in the field of Legal Project Management and literally wrote the book. She also has unique expertise in Legal Process Improvement, Legal Portfolio Management, Legal Transformation and Legal Operations.

As a leading global expert in Legal Project Management, she has worked with thousands of lawyers to develop their capabilities and skills. As part of this work, she supports lawyers to improve their personal productivity and create habits that underpin their success.

## Next steps...

If you're interested in my free Personal Productivity Tools Checklist and a massive discount on the Personal Productivity Online Course to support everyone dealing with the changes brought about by COVID-19 then [click here](#).

***My aim is to inspire you to achieve great things and I look forward to joining you on your journey! Cheers....T***

