

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Chris Bailey | Hyperfocus Secrets for Better Productivity (Episode 247)

If you feel like you can only work for an average of 40 seconds before becoming distracted, you're just like the rest of us. In fact, 40 percent of everything we do every single day is on autopilot, and we can't just blame our mobile phones and social media for the distraction — it's ultimately our habits that keep us from being at our best and most productive.

On this episode we talk to Chris Bailey, host of the *Becoming Better Podcast* and author of *Hyperfocus* and *The Productivity Project*, about the attention-overload gap that makes multitasking an illusion for most of us, what it takes to turn mere mindfulness into practical productivity, and the problem-solving power of scatterfocus (known to most by its close cousin “boredom”).

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The Need to Unfocus

You're sitting at your desk for what seems like forever trying to work out a problem. But it's when you get up and walk into the other room for a cup of coffee that the obvious solution hits you. Sound familiar? Chris says we spend our unfocused moments thinking about the future around 48 percent of the time, the present around 28 percent of the time, and the past around 12 percent of the time. That leaves some time left over to ponder a combination of all three. Chris calls this period of unfocus *scatterfocus*.

“When we connect these three mental destinations — we connect the past to the future to the present to the future to the past — we come up with ideas we would never arrive at otherwise. We need to focus, but this is the big thing that changed how I worked when I was writing this book: we also need to unfocus.”

Whatever you're doing right now, pause for the next three minutes and keep track of where your mind wanders. Then take a three-minute walk around wherever you are and note where your mind wanders. What differences do you notice between when and how your mind wanders depending on what you're doing?

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Novelty Bias

“The novelty bias is inherent within our attention whereby, for every new and novel thing we direct our focus at, our mind rewards us with a hit of dopamine — the pleasure chemical most of us are familiar with. We wake up and we check our email; we get a hit of dopamine. 40 seconds after that, perhaps, we check Instagram. We get another hit of dopamine. We check Twitter; we get another hit of dopamine. We check Slack; we get another hit 40 seconds later. We don’t necessarily fall victim to distraction so much as we take a hit of distraction because of this dopamine-fueled novelty bias, so mind this tendency when you get into this period of scatterfocus.”

To get an idea of the distractions that most actively trigger your novelty bias, jot down the things you notice causing your attention to wander every 40 seconds. Which ones can you remove from your work space? Which ones are inseparable, and why?

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Habitual Mode

For fostering creative thoughts, “there are a few ways you can enter [habitual] mode,” says Chris. “One of the best ways that researchers found leads to the greatest number of creative insights, leads us to get more rest, and leads us to scatter our attention for longer is doing something fun and simple and habitual that lets our mind wander at the same time yet anchors our attention down into doing something.”

When you find yourself with a number of unresolved open loops in your life — perhaps the intention to reconnect with old friends or the desire to put the finishing touches on that epic ode to your favorite cheese — try going for a nature walk (sans headphones) with a notepad on hand or taking a shower (sans music, podcasts, or whatever you might usually listen to) with [Aqua Notes](#) nearby should stray thoughts arise that you can jot down.

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Capture Mode

“If I find I’m going through a big period of work where I’m putting together a book, for example, there are just so many ideas floating through my mind,” says Chris. “There are so many projects coming up. There are so many talks that I’m doing on the horizon. I’ll just set a timer for 20 minutes, lay on the floor in my office, and have just a notepad and a pen and just capture whatever comes up [related to] a problem in mind that I want to mull over.”

When you find yourself overwhelmed by a number of competing thoughts that never arrive at a resolution, try removing yourself from the fray and setting a timer for 20 minutes, jotting down whatever comes to mind. See what solutions you can capture in the process.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for capturing thoughts during the 'Capture Mode' exercise.

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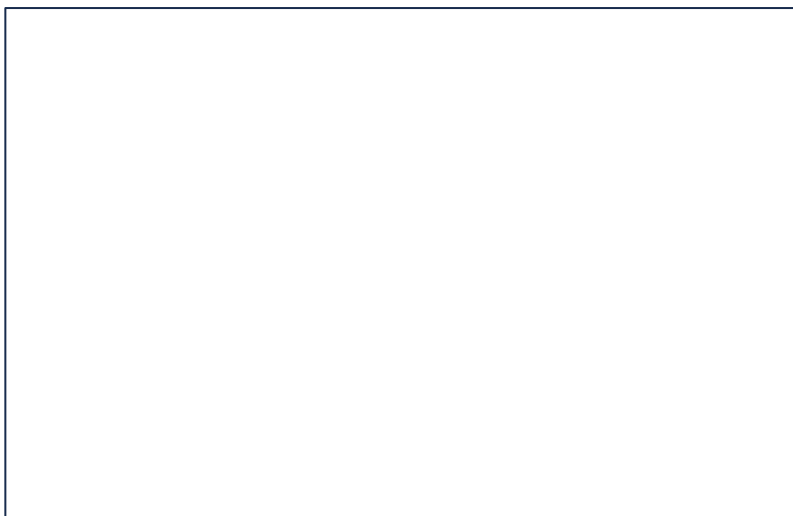
Scatterfocus vs. Boredom

“The difference between scatterfocus and boredom is the things that anchor you into scattering your attention don’t necessarily have to make you bored,” says Chris.

“You might experience feelings of boredom during periods of scatterfocus, but all boredom is is the feeling we experience when our mind adjusts from a state of high stimulation into a state of low stimulation.

Scatterfocus may lead to feelings of boredom, which isn’t necessarily a bad thing — it’s a sign that your mind is actually calming down for once! But they’re kind of cousins in a way.”

Like any kind of practice, the more we remove ourselves from our usual state of overstimulation, the better we get at achieving scatterfocus *without* getting bored, restless, or anxious. You don’t have to **deliberately bore yourself for an hour a day for a month like Chris did, but you could benefit from taking some time each day to remove yourself from your usual distractions and noting what happens.**



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Attention Overload Gap

“We used to think we could hold six to eight things in our mind at one time, but more research has shown that number to be much smaller. It’s more like three or four things. “There’s a concept called attentional residue. We go from focusing on one thing to focusing on another thing. And as we go from the first thing to the second thing, there are remnants from that first task that still reside within our working memory.”

You can limit this attentional residue by setting a deadline for a task you’re completing; when you go from that task to another, your brain sees it as being more complete when you finish, so it doesn’t focus on it as much. *Alternatively*, you can try to increase your working memory capacity by **meditation — which research suggests can do so by up to 30 percent.**

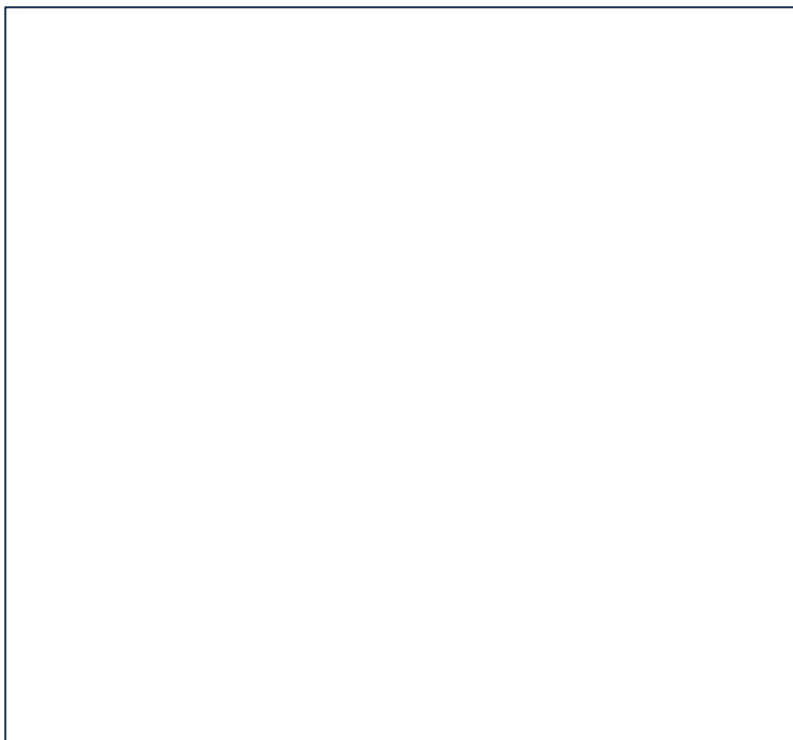


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Awareness Chimes

Mindfulness is a pretty popular buzzword at the moment, but it simply means being aware of what's going on in the current moment. Chris' *awareness chimes* exercise allows him to be more mindful and intentional with how he spends his time. "The more you do this, the more you can align yourself with what's important throughout the day," says Chris.

On your phone, set an hourly alarm to go off. When it goes off, ask yourself: "What's occupying my attention in this moment? Am I distracted? Am I trying to fill my attention to the brim? Am I working with intention right now? Is my mind wandering? How long have I been focused?"

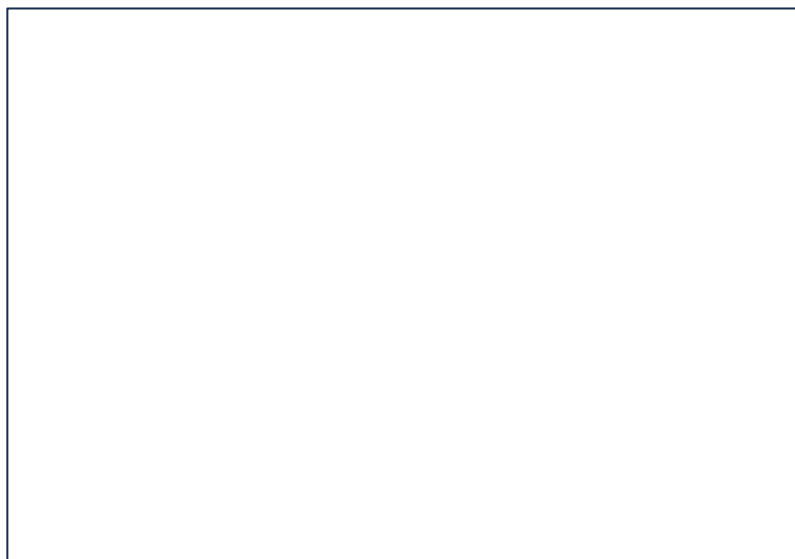


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Hiring and Firing Distractions

When you consider adding new devices, apps, books, podcasts, practices, or other potential distractions to your consumption queue, make sure you know what job you're "hiring" them to do. For instance, a productivity app does you no good if it consumes more time in your day than it saves. On the other hand, Chris swears by meditation as a valuable practice from which you easily earn back every minute you spend. He also points out that spending time to plan your day, exercising, drinking enough water, and eating well are all practices that pay back with interest.

Take inventory of what you might hire into — or fire from — your sphere of influence to make your life better. What can pull its weight, and what's just dead weight?



Full show notes and resources for this episode [can be found here.](#)

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We deconstruct the playbooks of the most successful people on earth – and learn new strategies, perspectives, and insights you can't find anywhere else. Then, take these valuable insights into your own life and live what you listen.

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