

# UNLOCKING THE DEEP BRAIN

OVERCOME THE LACK OF MOTIVATION  
AND TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR LIFE



Jason McClain

## BOOK DESCRIPTION

The world today is chaotic, draining, and distracting. It's a challenge for anyone trying to achieve any semblance of focus, productivity, and efficiency. Our minds are capable of existing and functioning at their peak within this haphazard environment, but why does it feel like that is not the case? And what can we do about it?

If you struggle with focusing, a lack of motivation, and being productive—whether because of internal or external reasons—this book is written for you. The aim is to help you leverage the unconscious processes of the brain to achieve long-term success. We will

- learn how to focus and pay attention
- learn how to build consistent habits
- overcome a lack of motivation
- build resilience

All of that without turning into boring, productivity-obsessed people.

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*Overcome the Lack of Motivation  
and Take Charge of Your Life*

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# INTRODUCTION

Have you ever woken up feeling refreshed and motivated to get things done and actually got things done? It feels good, doesn't it? You sit at your desk learning, working, creating, and when you lift your head, hours have gone by and you didn't even notice. You didn't feel the strain and the slog of trying to be productive and effective. It's like a superpower. We often wonder why we aren't always as productive, focused, and motivated as we sometimes are because if we got that way often enough, we could get a lot more done and become very successful.

There is no doubt that if you were given the opportunity to feel that way every day, you would take it. I have, in my time, met and been friends with people who are tremendously productive. At college, I had a friend who would study almost six hours a day every day, and they didn't seem to be exhausted. They kept a very clean room, were healthy, and were always in a good mood.

I couldn't fathom how someone could work so hard and yet be so happy. To me, sustaining focus for that long was almost impossible, and I couldn't see a way that hard work and happiness could go together. Even on days when I worked hard and I felt very good at the end of the day, I would always retreat to the conclave of my mind and think about how I couldn't possibly live that way. I had so many things I was curious about. So many of the things I wanted to do had nothing to do with being productive, but, at the time, they seemed very important. Things like binge watching a season of *Game of Thrones*, reading *Dark Tower* novels, gaming, or reading random articles online about topics that had nothing to do with what I was studying. I can't say I was focused, productive, or motivated to stick to the many things I wanted to do that I knew were good for me. I didn't know what to do about it until I understood the deep brain.

The deep brain is not a technical term; at least, I don't think so. It's a term I came up with to sum up all the knowledge I have learned that has made me a much more focused, productive, happy, and motivated person than I have ever been in my life. Look, being distractible, unmotivated, unproductive, and constantly behind is a drag. It's a drag on the quality of your life and in a plethora of interconnected domains, like social life, professional life, and personal ambitions. The bad news is that without help, without opening your eyes, it can be hard to break free of the systems and habits that are dragging you down. The good news is that with the right information, you can change all of that, plus: you don't need willpower, it won't be unpleasant, and you are more likely to keep at it. In short, you can become the focused, productive, and motivated person you want to be, and it's not hard. Emphasis on it *not being hard*.

## **An Important Promise**

Okay, it's time I address some of your concerns before we go into the book. A lot of self-improvement books out there are generally great books, but I think they suffer from the boredom disease: making their readers boring people. I'm not kidding. When you imagine someone who reads self-help books, practices life hacks, and is successful, do you imagine someone happy or someone who is very good at performing their happiness to others so that they can accumulate wealth or recognition? Do you imagine someone you would love to have a drink with or invite to your party?

I bet many of you don't. That's just what self-help books are very good at painting. We don't see smiling, laughing people drinking beer, playing games, and watching sports. We see chiseled model men and women doing something more 'wholesome,' like drinking smoothies, listening to podcasts while they run, listening to audiobooks while they clean up, and meeting up with a group of other good-looking friends at a healthy-looking restaurant. Or we see people in suits, or casually dressed but very skilled tech workers,



who listen to lo-fi while they code and maximize their productivity through an array of time-saving hacks. In short, we don't think of fun, relaxation, happiness, and freedom. We don't see *ourselves*.

That is what I mean by the boredom disease. Nobody imagines a fun person when they think of words like self-improvement, focused, productive, and motivated. I promise that I don't want to turn you into a boring person. You are not here to be 'programmed' or 'disciplined,' although you will walk away from this book a lot more focused, productive, and motivated than you have ever been before. I take a stance against the boredom disease of self-improvement books because I want you to enjoy life. Life, I believe, is a gift that is precious and meant to be enjoyed first and foremost, and all this other stuff is in service of that. You can do things that are good for you and still enjoy life; these things are not mutually exclusive.

I mentioned my friend who studied six hours a day earlier, kept a clean place, and was very happy. I'm sure that you saw a picture of a very studious, boring student in your mind. Like the sort of person you can't stand hanging out with for more than 15 minutes because they wouldn't have anything interesting to talk about except their books—no fun experiences or embarrassing human moments. In fact, you would likely think they would judge you for how you live your life. But my friend was fun, my only complaint was that I couldn't hang out with him as often as I wanted to. He loved music, he chased girls, he got sloshed, and he loved talking about movies, books, and philosophy. At the end of the year, he would still get awards for outperforming all of us. You could say he had his cake and ate it, too. That is what being a focused, productive, motivated person should be like, in my humble opinion.

Now, let's learn how you can unlock the deep brain and gain focus, motivation, and efficiency without being a boring person.

# CHAPTER 1:

## THE DEEP BRAIN

It's important to understand what our brains do so that we can use them better. Technically, you are your brain, but not knowing how unseen parts of your brain work can make you feel like you have little control over your life, behavior, and/or ability to pay attention. It's only when we bring these insights into our conscious mind that we can begin to work with our brains to get where we want.

When you think about your brain, what do you think its main job is, and how do you think it achieves that? The answer to this question is the foundation from which we will build everything else to make use of. The answer is a crash course in neuroscience. It is our deep brain, and unlocking it is the secret to success.

### **What Does the Brain Do?**

Every second of your life, what do you think goes on in your brain unbeknownst to you, and why do you think it's going on? You know the brain keeps you alive, that it allows you to see, hear, touch the world, and that it is responsible for allowing you to understand the words I am using. It gives dreams, memories, feelings, and so much more. In short, the brain is behind your experience of life, but what exactly does the brain do? The things I mentioned are the things that the brain gives us, not exactly what it does functionally. Your experience, the sounds you hear, and everything else is a result of what the brain does.

You won't believe what I am going to tell you, but as boring as it sounds, it's true. Your brain is a very efficient prediction machine; that is what it primarily does, and that miraculously keeps you alive, experiencing the richness of reality and life (Lisa Feldman Barrett,

2020). Sure, your brain allows you to do things and think things as well, but prediction is a super important component of all that.

When you wake up in the morning and you reach toward your nightstand to grab your phone, your mind already has a model of what your room looks like and where your phone is and where you are situated in the room. It shows you that model, and that model is what you experience as reality. While it's showing that model, it quickly checks it against the information it receives from your senses and only changes parts of the model that don't match the information it receives. In other words, it's not just your eyes that gather and create a picture of what you see at any given moment. It's a combination of what your mind predicts it will see and some of what your eyes tell it. That model is a prediction of what you will see and of how things are. The process of the brain correcting that information and changing what you see happens so quickly, we don't realize it. For instance, if you look at your nightstand and don't see your phone, you don't see a picture of your phone disappear from the nightstand as the brain corrects your model. You simply realize that your phone is not there, so it must be somewhere else.

Your brain has various prediction models running in your mind at any given moment. The questions are, why? And how? Why doesn't the brain just see, listen, or do whatever in the normal way like we would expect? Why all these models?

Well, think of it from the perspective of your brain. Your brain is born in a dark box that is your skull. It receives lots of data from your senses and from within the body, and it doesn't know what it all means. The brain has to build models, make sense of that data, and test them somehow using your sensations or actions. As it receives more data, it builds upon those models; discarding bad ones, refining old ones, and adding new models to make sense of the data until it can create a world as rich as the one you experience today. That means you literally had to learn to see, how to move in the world, that walls are hard, and much more. Everything about your experience is a robust model that has been built over your

lifetime through unimaginable amounts of data and computation that the best computers in the world cannot rival. What you experience and see as reality is not reality as it truly is; it's the model your brain sculpted for you (Lisa Feldman Barrett, 2020).

That means your experience is a kind of complex hallucination. Your brain has no choice, and it can't directly interact with realities. It can only build very good models of the world out there because it is stuck in your skull where it is protected. All this predicting and modeling happens without our conscious awareness, and a lot more happens in the brain without our conscious awareness. We all experience our brain's prediction machine consciously when we read a sentence that has missing words or typos and we don't spot them; we still understand everything the writer wanted to say.

Our brain is paying attention and processing huge amounts of data coming from all senses even when we are not aware of it. The brain decides what information is most important or relevant to our conscious experience and makes us conscious of that information when it chooses. For instance, you might be in a restaurant where people at another table are gossiping, and you are not aware of it until one of them mentions your name. It's like, as soon as your name is mentioned, your brain decides you should hear the conversation. That is because your brain has learned to associate the utterance of your name with something you should pay attention to, so it directs your attention to the conversation. Another example is that you may be walking down the street minding your own business when you suddenly catch a movement at the corner of your eye, an object flying toward you, so you duck. You weren't particularly paying attention until the moment your brain decided you should know someone was throwing a shoe at you and it told you to duck. If you are in a park and the same thing happens, you won't react with alarm or think someone is trying to hurt you. Your brain might say, "A ball is flying toward you" instead of a shoe. You might not even react, thinking they aimed it elsewhere and you are just crossing paths. Your brain knows how to make those guesses,

and most of the time its models and predictions are correct and keep us safe.

How does your brain know how to do that? It learns from experience and your memories. At any given moment, the brain is constantly asking itself, "When I encountered something similar in the past, how did I react and what was the result of that?" Then it makes the right adjustments and responds. It tells you to feel afraid, be happy, or see a ball instead of a shoe. Then it learns from that experience and readjusts its model. It's a beautiful thing, and the reason why the brain does this is to keep you alive.

The deep brain runs your life. It constantly tells you what you should be aware of and what it means and what you can maybe do about it. It tells you to be aware when you feel pangs in your stomach and your concentration is waning, so you can realize you are hungry and get food. It makes you drowsy around mid-afternoon to tell you it's a good time to nap. It tells you to stop reading because you need a break to make sense of all the information you have learned. It makes you feel angry when someone betrays you, because you need the energy to confront them and seek justice. You may not know what exactly it is trying to say, but you know it makes you feel things and become aware of things so that you can make the changes that work.

I use the word 'work' because people don't always do exactly what their deep brain tells them. They often do something that 'tricks' the deep brain. For instance, instead of taking a nap, they drink coffee to feel more alert. Instead of eating a meal that is full of nutrients that your brain and body need, you just eat something that will satiate you. Over time, we learn to fulfill the needs of our brain with habits that are unhealthy, counterproductive, and dangerous in the long run. There are a lot of things in our society that trick our deep brain that weren't there when our brains evolved, and our brains couldn't have predicted them, so they have become vices. For instance, when our brains evolved to love sugar, it was for survival in a time when sugar was scarce and was only found in nutritious fruits and

vegetables. It didn't know we would eventually live in a society where refined sugar is always valuable, so that love for sugar is now a problem because it would be best to like sugar less in today's environment. If we truly listened to our deep brain, if we truly worked the way it was designed to work and responded to it in the right ways, we would unlock tremendous power.

Am I saying that the brain already knows how to pay attention, be productive, and get motivated? Yes, I am. The problem is how we treat it and the situations we put our brains in that make paying attention and being productive and motivated very difficult. That means, if we treat it better and put it in the right situations, doing those things should be easy. Our deep brain is mostly good.

## **Time and Deep Brain**

The deep brain experiences and deals with time differently than the conscious brain. Using our conscious brain, we can think about the future or the past, or focus on the present, but we can't do both or all at the same time. In our conscious experience and dealings, we mostly focus on the present even when we aim for things in the far future. For instance, you may be working toward being a doctor, but at your present moment, you are just focused on studying a chapter on the immune system and understanding it. Your attention is on the page. Most of our conscious brain works like that, with goals that are in front of us; although we sometimes worry about the future, we can't worry and focus on a page at the same time.

The deep brain, which influences the conscious mind, is always living in the past, the present, and the future (Bargh, 2019). Why? So it can tell your brain or direct your behavior in ways that are the most important. When we are focused in the present, we often miss the bigger picture or context, and the deep brain is there to remind us of it. You might be a medical student, but you are also a person who is afraid of spiders and the dark. Your brain has kept a record of that. So the deep brain checks for spiders in the library and pays attention to the lighting without your awareness. If it sees something

that might be a spider, it will scream “Spider!” and you will react, perhaps jumping on your chair if the spider is on the floor. You are also someone who wants to have a date, so it scans your surroundings for anyone who might be a possible mate and adjusts your behavior and posture without your awareness whenever a possible mate sits close to your desk. If you just saw someone get mugged, it might make you more apprehensive when encountering strangers even when they might be potential mates.

As you are studying your medical textbook in the library, your deep brain is also in the present by trying to assimilate all the new information into older models and refining those models. This happens slowly, and it is much harder when you are awake. The deep brain prefers to do all that when you are sleeping or doing something else, but it starts now anyway. It uses all the models that are relevant to your current situation to scan the environment around you for what is important. You are not aware of this, so it does not break your concentration until it decides it should.

The deep brain is also always in the future in another way. It always anticipates things and expects things and keeps track of your goals. For instance, if the library has slippery floors, the deep brain anticipates this as you walk to the library and begins preparing you for walking on the floor. If you have walked on the floor a lot, you won't even notice the deep brain as it helps you glide over the floor to your favorite spot. It knows you want to get back to your dorm in time to watch the new *Euphoria* episode, so you will notice yourself getting more and more restless and unable to concentrate as the time draws near.

It does all this at once, all the time constantly adjusting how you behave, recommending actions, or just giving you vague information for you to make sense of with your conscious effort. For instance, it might decide to remind you of something your late uncle used to say. It might make you a bit sad, but your deep brain decides to show you that as part of your grieving process. The conscious brain and the deep brain work together all the time in different ways, but

the deep brain deals with a whole lot more than our conscious mind does or can. Our conscious brains are limited, although they are very good at certain tasks that require sustained focus.

Like I said, the point of understanding all this is learning to work with your brain to get where you want to go.



## **CHAPTER 2:**

# HABIT FORMATION

Habits are behaviors we repeat over and over whenever we are faced with a particular set of conditions. We often do them without thinking because they have become so ingrained. They are automated processes. Habits are often points of attack whenever someone needs to change or achieve a goal. For instance, if you want to get in shape, you might target your eating habits; instead of overeating and consuming sugary foods, you might restrict your calories and avoid sugar. If any lasting change is to be desired, new habits need to be cultivated. Why habits? Habits taken together make up a person.

People who have gone through the process of trying to change their habits will tell you it is hard. They frequently revert back to their old behaviors. We often experience this ourselves. We might begin the year by swearing to go to the gym, do that for the first couple of weeks, and then stop going as it slowly becomes more and more difficult to motivate ourselves to go to the gym again. That is because we have not understood how habits work, how our brain creates habits, or why it makes habits. If we understand those aspects of habit formation and nature, we will find ourselves in a better position to engender new habits.

### **How Do Habits Form?**

The first time you encounter a math problem, it is hard. Upon finding a solution, you will make note of the steps you took so that you remember the process next time. The second time you come across a similar problem, you have that solution to refer to. When you work on the problem now, you make some adjustments to your

methods to make the process easier and more efficient. This time, solving the problem was easier. The third time, it's super easy because our methods are more refined. You don't need to think that hard about solving the problem anymore.

Every time I sit at my desk, I open my laptop, press the spacebar, and plug my phone into a charger cable on my desk. I don't think about it at all, as it's very convenient, but these habits are formed to fix a problem. They are easy, repeatable, and rewarding. I pressed the spacebar to wake up my laptop. I found it's the most efficient way after trying to use the power button, which I sometimes press too lightly to have an effect. I always plug in my phone on my desk because I know I am much more likely to leave the device alone if I am working on my laptop. I could try to improve these habits more, but they have stayed the way they are for a year now because they are perfect for my needs; most importantly, they don't require any effort.

When you look at habits you struggle to change, you will see they are often easy, repeatable, and efficient. They aren't that demanding. You don't feel a weight on your shoulder or a ton of effort. The behavior flows out of you, and sometimes you are not even aware you have started the sequence of doing the behavior until you are halfway there. For instance, if after returning home from work, the first thing you do is open up any of your devices and play games, you may see yourself already loading into a game when you had planned to read a book instead. You simply find yourself already doing the thing.

Any of the habits you have come into being to respond to a situation, and they have stayed because they are easy and rewarding. The first time you come across a new situation, your brain works hard to find an appropriate response to the situation. It asks itself, "When I encountered something similar before, what did I do, and can I do that here?" Then it tries responses until it finds one that works.

The first time you go to a party, socializing is hard. But your brain refers to similar experiences when you were thrown into a group of

people eager to socialize and formulates a response. After a while, you get the hang of it, and every time you arrive at a party, you just act in ways that have worked for you in the past. You know to introduce yourself to people who seem interesting, find your friends, grab a beer, dance to music, or participate in party activities. You do all this without thinking about it too much, and pretty soon, it's just how you behave at parties.

The next time you go to a party, your brain will prepare your party behaviors based on experience and the type of party. Some things are on autopilot, because some aspects of parties are the same. For instance, it's common for people to offer beverages at parties. Your brain knows this and has prepared a response. So, when the host asks, "Would you like something to drink?", you find yourself saying yes, because it's just what you do at parties. Some things are unexpected at parties. For that, your brain needs to come up with a response that is not part of your typical sequence.

Your brain is constantly playing a game of "If this happens, then this" or "If I see this, I start this behavior sequence." In a sense, habits are preset behaviors that occur when certain conditions are fulfilled. That is why they are so easy and repeatable. This means your brain is constantly looking for triggers to respond to. Once it responds to that trigger, it then assesses the results and moves on to the next thing. The assessing results part is there to determine whether that was the correct response and if it was rewarding. It means a habit has four components: the trigger, the sequence, the reward, and the assessment.

The **trigger** is the condition, situation, or problem that elicits the behavior. The trigger signals the brain to start a sequence of actions, like how a ringing phone prompts you to pick it up. Triggers can be something as obvious as a ringing phone, or they may be something more subtle, like the sight of a game icon on your desktop. If every time you visit a store, you always go to the restaurant across the street, going to the grocery store begins the sequence of actions that will lead you to the restaurant. That is why it is so hard to leave the

store and go straight home—it's your trigger. Your brain cued a visit to the restaurant the moment you started going to the store. The moment you walk out of the store, you will see your eyes wander toward the restaurant, and the real test begins. The momentum to go to the restaurant is hard to resist because it has been building for so long. That's why it will often be easier to say "Okay, this is the last time" than to go home. It's likely not the last time, and you know it.

The **sequence** is the behavior that always comes after the trigger. This behavior is the habit part. Sometimes the behavior is simple, like saying hi when someone smiles at you at a party. Sometimes it is more complex, like a chain of sequences that build on each other. We call this a routine. We all have them. For instance, I always wake up, check the time, shower, make breakfast, and eat while I watch something. My routine is triggered by the need to have sufficient energy before tackling the workday. On weekends, the routine changes because it is triggered by a different set of needs and expectations.

The **reward** is what you get for that behavior. It is the thing that makes the behavior worthwhile. The reward doesn't have to be something as obvious as "I do x and I get y." It can be something less obvious, like "I do x to avoid having to deal with y." The reason why I always plug in my phone when at my desk is to avoid a situation where I am low on battery when I really need to use it for extended periods of time. It gives me peace of mind knowing my phone is sufficiently powered. Sometimes when I use the power button to wake up my computer, I press it twice, inadvertently shutting it down. To avoid having to boot, I use the spacebar. When these habits formed, I was just fixing a problem that bothered me. Sometimes even fixing the problem is the reward unto itself. With any behavior that you repeat over and over, there is a payoff for it.

Remember, the reward doesn't have to be something that is objectively rewarding in the long run. It needs to be rewarding now, to your brain. For instance, eating healthily and exercising is something that is objectively rewarding because your health will

improve. However, although you know these things are good, what's rewarding to your brain—in the moment—is the good feeling it gets when it eats food that tastes good, or when you experience the fun of running at night. This is important to note, because long-term rewards and motivators are often not good at helping your brain develop a habit. To achieve ambitious goals, every step of the way has to be rewarding, not just the end; it's the only way for your brain to stay motivated.

Think of people who were very motivated and worked hard to get out of poverty when the rewards of the work they were putting in were in the far future. This isn't testament to how more focused their brains are. At every step of the way, the hard work felt rewarding and served as an assurance against the anxiety of being perpetually economically insecure. Think about it; if studying hard is your chance out of poverty and it quells your anxiety, you are likely to keep studying even when things get difficult. Why? Because that is your only medicine against the fear and anxiety around your situation. Every day you study, you feel good and less anxious, and that is your reward. Five years later, that culminates into a lucrative career, and your goal is reached.

**Assessment** is the stage where your brain asks, "Was that worth it, considering the effort and the reward?" The point of this stage is to ensure whether keeping the behavior is still a good idea. One of my favorite things to do when I was younger was ride a bicycle. I had only one, and each ride was a great experience, so I did it often. After a while, the bicycle started having problems. I'd come back from a ride with this and that not working, and I had to work to get it moving again. That lasted about two months until I stopped riding. Why? Because it just wasn't worth the trouble anymore. That assessment mechanism had taken over in the long run.

When you go to the gym because of a New Year's resolution, it might feel rewarding at first. The next day when you wake up with aches, the assessment mechanism kicks in, asking, "Is it worth it?" You tell yourself the soreness will sort itself as your body acclimates

to your workout routine. You find that sometimes getting to the gym is cumbersome. The mechanism asks if it's still worth it, and you still say yes. You try to make friends at the gym, but you hardly have anything in common with any of them. Your brain now has more to consider in its cost-benefit analysis until slowly, you find it harder and harder to go to the gym, as the cost-benefit analysis tips in favor of "not worth it." So, you stop going to the gym and fall back into your old habits. The assessment mechanism works consciously and unconsciously.

## **Why Do Some Habits Stick While Others Fall Away?**

We now know how habits form and what their components are, but what makes certain habits stick while others fall away? The clues are the four components of habits we discussed. Remember, habits exist because the brain wants to make things easy and more efficient. So, it's not surprising that habits that are cued, easy, and worth it often stay with us.

A cued habit is one where there is a constant or reliable reminder/trigger for the habit. For instance, if the only time you exercise is when you feel motivated, exercising won't become a habit because motivation is often unreliable and inconsistent. Scrolling through social media is a habit that is likely to stick because it has so many reliable cues, like notifications and icons on your screen. That is why the first step to using social media less is often muting notifications and removing social media icons from your home screen. That gets rid of the triggers that prompt you to use these apps, so you use them less and less until, sometimes, you lose all interest.

For a habit to be easy, it needs to take the least amount of effort to engage. It can't be a little difficult. It needs to be inconsequentially easy. For instance, if you want to start a reading habit, don't aim to read for 30 minutes a day. I know 30 minutes sounds doable when you first think about it, but reading for 30 minutes is not easy when you are not a regular reader. It's just not. If you want to read more

books, start with the simple habit of reading for five minutes. I know it sounds like at that pace you will read one book a year, but that's not going to happen.

If a habit requires more effort, you will need a lot of motivation to do it. Motivation won't always be there when you need it, but to read for five minutes, you don't need motivation. Sometimes reading more is about getting started, not setting an arbitrary number. Some days you will read for five minutes, and you will be proud of yourself. One day you sit down to read for five minutes and get carried away. Remember, even if you get carried away, don't change your goal of five minutes. The extra minutes or hours are just bonuses. Don't force anything.

What usually happens when people read for five minutes is that they read a lot more than that because they ignite their hunger to read and never overstretch themselves. But people who want to start with a hard habit of reading 30 minutes a day will struggle, because some days they will be tired, groggy, or not have the time. But five minutes is not a big deal, even on a busy day. That is why easy habits are more likely to stick than harder habits. We will talk more about this later.

Also, the habit must be worthwhile when the effort is compared to the reward. It needs to feel like it is a fair trade—that your work has been rewarded, considering everything else. For instance, if you read for 30 minutes a day but it's at the cost of missing out on a favorite soap opera, you might struggle to maintain that habit.

## **The Power of Habits**

Habits have a cumulative effect on us. They are what makes us who we are. A person is a lot of things, but also a collection of their habits. Think about it. You don't become a good drummer by drumming once, you don't get fit by lifting weights once, and you don't become a good writer because you wrote an essay once. All these things require habit. By the same logic, if you know someone

who you think is good at something, you can trace those abilities to habits they began cultivating a long time ago.

The size of the habit is not important—it's doing it consistently and often enough that really matters. The benefits you get from a habit, no matter how tiny, accumulate over time to a point where, from the outside, it appears that the person has worked really hard or made drastic changes to get where they are. We often hear people who are successful at something talk about "10-year overnight success" or "three-year overnight success." That characterization is correct, because people don't suddenly become good or successful at something out of nowhere. Success is usually a result of consistent effort put in over a long time rather than big efforts taken over a short period of time.

The quest to cultivate new habits is really the quest to change oneself and the direction you are heading. As you adopt new habits, your behavior changes, and it is that change in behavior that leads to a new person. You will also begin to see yourself differently. Think about it this way: If you have never thought of yourself as a reader, cultivating a reading habit will change that perception of yourself. Other people will recognize you as such if you keep the habit long enough.

That change in identity that happens from within is one of the most powerful things you can experience, because once your identity shifts, you will see yourself as someone who genuinely enjoys doing something instead of someone who just does something; and going back is not easy. You will glide through a lot of the friction you may have encountered, and the effort it takes to begin almost completely slips away.

There is a big difference between someone who considers themselves a runner and someone who runs. The person who runs does not think of running as something defining. It is one activity among many that they could substitute for another and it wouldn't be a big deal. Running is a means of getting something that they want, and the focus is on the rewards instead of the activity itself. There is nothing



inherently wrong with thinking this way. The problem is that running can be substituted with anything that gives the person the benefits they are looking for.

To a person who considers themselves a runner, they do not conceive of themselves or of a world in which they don't run. Running is not what they do, it's who they are. To this person, the benefits of running are just an added bonus. It's not the reason why they run—they run because that is who they are, not because of what running may do for them. Of course, they enjoy running and love all the benefits they get from running, but they just don't think of it that way. They have a deep drive to run, and if they don't get a chance to do it, they miss it. If they were told there is another routine they could do to get all the benefits and pleasure they get from running, they wouldn't even think of doing it.

The identity shift is reinforcing the habit as the habit has shaped their identity. I know what this is like from firsthand experience. I am a person who loves learning new things, but I don't do it because I have a "learn something new each day" habit to cross off on my habit tracker app (I don't even have a habit tracker app). I just consider myself a curious person. I can't not be curious and want to learn something because that is just not who I am. Even if you told me you had invented technology to upload knowledge into my brain, I don't think I would use it. Where is the pleasure in that? I enjoy every bit of learning something new, even the hard parts and the setbacks, because they make finally understanding something worthwhile.

The point of cultivating new habits is not so you can cross off things from a long list and brag about it. The point is to change. Stopping short of that is excluding yourself from experiencing the full power of habits.

I have spoken about habits and consistency. I need to clarify, because it denotes that the habit is done every day, no matter what happens. My concept of consistency is laxer than that. In my book, if you do something more days than not, then you are consistent in that habit.

For instance, if you read four days a week, you are a reader. Why the lax-ness? We don't demand or expect unbroken consistency with the habits we consider part of our identity. I constantly learn new things, but I don't do that every day of the week, though I do it often enough to consider it a defining part of who I am. Even people who consider themselves drinkers (not alcoholics) don't drink alcohol every day, but they do drink an amount that suggests they are drinkers as opposed to casual drinkers. As you can see, the same thing works with good or bad habits. This is not to deny that we sometimes have habits that we partake in every day, like drinking coffee in the morning.

We have learned three major things in this chapter. We learned that habits are essentially shortcuts of the brain that automate dealing with certain types of situations or problems. We learned how habits form and how simple, consistently triggered, and rewarding habits stick with us while others fall away. We also saw how habits can shape an identity, and vice-versa.

## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **“MANY YOUS”**

One of the most popular problems out there about the human psyche is that we are irrational and therefore much more likely to do things that are inconsistent with what our overarching goals are in life. We have all experienced this in some shape or form. For instance, you may want to save money but find yourself spending a huge amount of your cash to buy a newly released game instead of waiting for it to be a little cheaper. Some people would look at that and say you were being irrational, since your goal of saving money is arguably more important than buying a new game title, which you will enjoy now and regret later.

In fact, I would go as far as to argue that our problems with experiencing regret stems from having taken an action that somehow negates our goals. How can we explain our penchant for doing things we regret? Things that are counterproductive and hurt us in the long run? Habit forming and applying the principles we will discuss in this and the next chapter is a huge part of staying in the narrow. However, we need to be able to understand what is truly going on with us when we make such a decision, so we can respond better to it. That entails understanding the concept of “many yous.”

### **You Are Many**

One of the biggest myths we can tell ourselves is that we are one person from one moment to the next who harbors the same desires in an unbroken continuum. The second biggest myth is that all our goals are complimentary. Both ideas are wrong, because we are not exactly one person from one moment to the next, and not all our goals support each other (Pinker, 2021). How can that be?

Ask yourself this: Do you still like all the things you used to like when you were younger? Do you still want all of the things you wanted last week? How about last night? When you were younger, you may have loved everything Pokémon, and Pokémon might have been your world. Last week, all you might have wanted to do was binge watch the new series of *Ozark* or hang out with friends. Last night, you may have wanted to have a few more beers than was good for you, but today, at this moment, you don't want any of those things. You have new desires, and those desires won't be the same as the ones you will have tomorrow, in a week, month, or the next five years. Change is the name of the game.

You could argue you were not the same person then as you are now, but we know that is just a manner of speaking. You are still the same person. You harbor the same memories and experiences and you have private access to all of your thinking and feeling when you pursue your goals; so, too, in the future when you look back at this moment.

What is going on here? What is going on is that the situation around you, which is most important and meaningful, changes with time. Some of your desires are more stable than others, and some are more irregular or only applicable for the moment you are in. That is natural. On the side of your most stable desires are the ones that are essential to your survival and overall happiness over the long term. These are things like food, sex, being in a secure job, housing, friendship, and more. Irregular desires often come with situations you are in and leave when the situation passes. For instance, if you are in a very hot room, your desire to make the room cooler might be more important than filing taxes. But as soon as you get that sorted, your desire to get your taxes done might be more motivating. Some of your stable desires are a result of your genes, your environment, how you grew up, and luck. We all have things that are important to us, but we don't know how that came to be. We simply consider them a part of who we are. For me, it's my love of music that is this way.

In short, you change, your situation changes, and you are born with certain proclivities that will have an influence on your desires throughout your life. If that was all there was to the story, things would be way more simple for us, but that is not how it is. In addition to all of this, we don't always have desires that are compatible. Your desire to eat ice cream and fast food lives in the same brain as your desire to be healthy and live a long life. In fact, incompatible and irrelevant desires often coexist, constantly competing for us to act on them.

Sometimes we have desires that are strictly incompatible. For instance, my desire to lose weight is incompatible with my desire to continue eating sugar and snacking. I can't do both and get what I want. If I choose to eat sugar and snacks, I won't lose weight. If I choose to lose weight, I won't get to eat sugar and snacks as I would like. Some desires compete for time, but they can coexist peacefully. My desire to watch TV can coexist with my desire to read more books. I will just have to be more mindful of my time so I can do both in a way I find satisfying.

Part of your brain's job is to help you fulfill your desires, and it does so through rational problem-solving tactics, even when there is emotion involved. The idea that emotions override logic is not scientific. For instance, if you make me angry and I end up saying horrible things to you, I am acting in a way that fulfills my desire to hurt you in the moment. If my goal is to hurt you, saying those horrible things is the rational thing to do. But an hour later when I have calmed down, I might realize that it is more important that I have a peaceful relationship with you, so I regret having yelled at you. The rational thing for me to do is to apologize and make amends. Notice how in both states my brain hasn't lost its ability to help me achieve my goals using problem-solving skills. Rationality is intact. What people mean when they say they weren't thinking is that they didn't prioritize their goals in a way that would give them the results they want in the long run.

Imagine you make me angry and I have a desire to hurt you, but as my anger rises, I remember my more important goal of remaining good friends with you; my brain will use its problem-solving skills to help me act in a way that ensures I don't hurt you instead. I might tell you that you have hurt my feelings and walk away but bite my tongue. Later on, I feel proud an hour later that I didn't explode on you. It's not because I fought my emotions, it's because I stayed true to them—my love for our friendship. But suppose I did not care about all of that. In that case, I might regret not yelling at you and telling you your business. The main issue is what goal/desire is more important in the long run.

All these desires represent different versions of you, or what you could be if you wanted to lean into them. Even when you don't understand how you acted, you still acted on the desire you had. You might not have that desire now, and the current version of you might despise it, but it still belongs to you. That is what is behind the "many yous" idea. It's understanding that you are a volatile but relatively stable combination of desires that is being tested by change, time, and significance.

This is why, to me, it does not make sense to be upset over being inconsistent sometimes. You are, in a way, consistent in responding to your desires. What you want is the ability to prioritize your desires so you can be more consistent. But if being happy for you is to attend to many of the things you desire, it would make no sense to shut off parts of yourself completely unless those parts were dangerous to what you are trying to build. You win and you don't win at the same time, you lose and you don't lose—it's all you. If you stop eating sugar, you lose out on sugar, but you also don't lose on your mission to lose weight. If you win with saving money, you also don't win playing brand new game releases. But the reason we are able to live with those compromises is our overall happiness. No amount of happiness is unblemished, but that is okay.

Why am I telling you all this? I want you to start practicing self-compassion and understanding for yourself, because all of it is you.

You can't make real progress if you don't accept that and acknowledge it for what it is. That self-understanding and compassion will help you stay on the path because you will learn that you don't lose anything if you mess up. If the desire is alive, you are still in the game. You still got it. People who are more forgiving of themselves are more successful and happier because of this.

Being tenacious doesn't come from hating and dragging down parts of yourself, or being exceptionally hard on yourself. It comes from laughing with yourself, dusting yourself off, loving yourself, and trusting yourself. Not just the parts that are convenient and likable, all the parts—all the 'you's in that brain of yours!

## **What Does All This Mean for Motivation?**

Obviously, an idea like this will have implications for many things, and even an insight. Motivation is notoriously unreliable (Fogg, 2020). You might go to bed with intention and motivation to wake up at 5 a.m. and run a mile, but somehow in the morning when the alarm goes off, that motivation is gone. You'd rather press the snooze button instead. What does the idea that you have many desires that compete or are in conflict with each other mean for motivation?

It has two implications. The first one is the explanation for why motivation is unreliable. In part, motivation is unreliable because the 'you' of any given moment will have other goals and desires that might run counter to what you were motivated to do earlier or yesterday. The best way to think about past motivation is to think of it as an urge by your then-present self to do the thing you have been meaning to do. For instance, when you wake up in the morning and you don't feel like running anymore, that urge is gone, and your present self has a different urge to sleep or get more rest. Motivation is unreliable because it is a product of different selves in time and place.

The second implication is that motivation is constant. In other words, your sense of losing motivation for something is accurate but

mistaken. You didn't lose your motivation, it simply shifted to something else. For instance, when your alarm wakes you in the morning, you are more motivated to go back to sleep but no longer motivated to go on a run. It sounds like a stupid distinction to make, but a lot of people overlook this fact, thinking that if they are no longer motivated, they don't have the drive to get things done. You still have it, but it is focused on something else when you want it to focus on a specific thing.

Motivation is the drive and at the same time the reason to do something. For instance, when you are motivated to run in the morning, you have an urge or drive and that also becomes your reason for wanting to run. You may have a higher goal for wanting to run, like staying fit, but at that moment, your motivation is the driving force. Your goal and desires are more like a running list of the things you want to achieve, but you are not always motivated to do them.

You need to be careful not to confuse motivation as discussed here with another meaning for motivation, which is the reason to do something. Used in a sentence, it is like, "He had motivation to defend her." The meaning of motivation here is about purpose and reason, not about an urge or drive. That is not the kind of motivation we are talking about. Yes, I did mention that motivation also becomes the reason for doing something, but by that I mean the feeling of being motivated is enough for you to want to do the thing and for that reason, in that moment. If you felt motivated to run in the evening and I asked you why, you would be right by replying, "I just feel like it. I'm just really amped for it today." One is about purpose and reason, the other is about urges and feelings.

Don't confuse desires and goals with motivation, either. Why? Because desires are more like goals than a drive or urge to do something. As a feeling, desires are not about doing but about knowing you need or want something. That knowing is the big part of a desire. It is a state of being unsatisfied or lacking. Feeling hungry is a desire, feeling like you need to get up and make food is



motivation. Motivation is about acting to fulfill desires or goals. It's the fuel you burn to do the things you have a strong desire for. A desire is wanting to get fit, motivation is feeling like you want to run.

It's a close and powerful relationship that is important to understand. At any given moment you have different strengths of desire-motivation bonds that make you attend to one desire instead of another. Your motivation hones your energy and action on one option out of many. For instance, when you wake up, you could shower, eat, scroll on social media, or go to bed. If you wake up feeling very hungry but you are also sleepy and feel more motivated to go back to bed, you will sleep instead of eat. In that instance, you're the bond between your motivation for sleep, and your desire to sleep is stronger than both desire to eat and motivation to eat. If that was confusing, just remember desire is realizing you need something, and motivation is being pushed to do something about it.

The confusion arises from how we use language. When someone says, "I want to eat," they may be saying they feel driven to eat, or they are feeling hungry. That is because often we use the word 'want' to refer to our desires or motivations. Our language doesn't always distinguish the two. It is often up to us to decipher which one the person speaking means according to the context. My brother has often said he wants to go to sleep late at night to express his desire to sleep, but he would stay up anyway because he feels motivated to game or study. In some instances, the word 'want' tells us the speaker is both desiring and motivated. The "I want to eat" sentence is a good example of a situation where both are being expressed.

A lot of the time when people speak about feeling motivated, they are talking about a positive feeling to do something. However, motivation isn't always a nice feeling, it's just the thing that drives you to do something. Anger can motivate you. Anxiety can motivate you. Stress can motivate you. All sorts of things can motivate you. We know this, but we tend to forget it when we talk about "not feeling motivated." When people look for motivation, they look for those positive, nice feelings that hype them up, but depending on

the situation, that might not create a strong desire-motivation bond to get you moving.

Procrastination is an example of where that bond is weaker, but it may be stronger elsewhere. When you play games instead of working on an assignment due tomorrow, you are experiencing a stronger desire-motivation bond to the game than to doing your assignment. In that situation, you are aware of the need to get your assignment done and your desire to play games, but for some reason you are more motivated to do one instead of the other. The obvious question that people ask is, “How can I turn that around?” In other words, what’s the process for making myself want to do the things that are important to me even when I don’t feel like it? The answer to that is habits. In other words, hacking your prediction machine to more reliably drive you to get things done. We will discuss the details later.

## **The Relationship Between Habits and Motivation**

The great thing about feeling motivated is that motivation allows you to do even things that are very difficult. If you are motivated enough, you can do very demanding tasks more regularly, like going to the gym. The problem is that we are not always motivated to do difficult things. In fact, it’s easier to feel motivated to do simple things. That is because our brains have a bias for keeping things simple (conserving energy when it can).

Habits win because they are good at simplifying difficult things, so we are reliably more motivated to do difficult things. Someone who has made the habit of exercising is not even aware of this relationship because it has become so automated. If one day they don’t feel motivated, they get into their routine anyway and before they know it, they feel “into it.” That means habits play the role of strengthening desire-motivation bonds over a longer period of time, instead of the one random time you feel motivated. That is why they no longer need to feel motivated to start exercising; the habits trigger

their feelings of being motivated, which they experience as being “into it.”

The same is true even of things we enjoy, like gaming. If you are a gamer, some days you might not feel like gaming, but you might start a game out of habit. As soon as you start playing, you get into the game and feel motivated to play more. The mistake that people make is wanting to start with motivation instead of routine or habits when they are trying to change how they do things over the long term. Motivation is good at short-term goals: pulling an all-nighter, rushing to the conference, working all week to get a report in, or randomly taking your partner out. Habits are good at long-term changes: stopping smoking, getting fit, losing weight, focusing, being a good partner, reading more, and learning a new skill.

What we’ve talked about so far has given us powerful clues for how we can change, pay attention more, focus, be more motivated, and get things done. If you have been paying attention, you should start to see the picture coming together. But there is one more important thing we need to discuss.

## **Facticity**

Phenomenologist philosophers came up with a very powerful term that helps explain the experience of existing: facticity. The term has different meanings for different philosophers and for different people. When people hear the word, they think it refers to facts or the fact-ness of things. To philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre, it refers to the background in which your freedom exists and is limited that inevitably contributes to your personhood. These elements are often out of control and given to you by luck. Some elements of your facticity may be more malleable than others—it depends.

We need to be clear on what facticity is. Facticity should not be confused with the environment, although it includes the environment. It is not things that happen to you, it is something

more nuanced and concrete than that. It is about the features that define your existence that are often unchangeable and not chosen.

Your facticity has a big impact on how your life will unravel. For instance, you do not choose in what country you will be born, what kind of family you will be born in, what race you will be, what sex, what time, under which system of governance, religion, and so much more. The elements of your facticity are those things and much more, and they shape your life or your experience of it. They can influence or determine how likely your life is to turn out a certain way because they represent the options available to you, given where you are and who you are.

For instance, if you are born in a remote village, your potential pool of friends is smaller. If you are born in France, you will likely speak French and adhere to many of the elements of that culture. You don't choose those things, but those things may affect your sense of what's acceptable and desirable in your life. They also become an inextricable part of your identity. For any given person, there are long list elements that inform their facticity, although these elements may limit their freedom or make some things harder, impossible, or less likely. They aren't the "end all, be all" of what it means to be you, but they matter a great deal. As you live life, you accumulate all sorts of tools, resources, and experiences that shape you and may influence the trajectory of your life; they may even remove or mitigate some limiting elements of your facticity.

For instance, if you are born with ADHD, certain things will be harder to do and others will be outside of your ability. ADHD will impact how you deal with tasks, how you focus, your ability to follow through, and your relationships. These things will last all your life, but there are things you can do to make the disorder not be a big hindrance in your life. You can take medication, go to therapy, and adopt systems/tools that help you function in more neurotypical ways.

However, some elements of your facticity cannot be changed unless you do something new. For instance, if you are born black, chances

are you will always be black, and that will affect your experience of the world; not because of anything that has to do with being black but because of how different societies and institutions treat people of color. You as an individual don't have much influence on that; it is just the state of affairs.

Why is it important to be mindful of your facticity? Because your facticity informs your range of possibilities: what is holding you back and what you are capable of. If you have a good understanding of those things, you can begin to use the resources you have in the most effective way. How is that?

Well, think of a person who has ADHD and struggles with focusing and gets too distracted if a task is not stimulating. If that person ignores their ADHD, they won't be able to be effective when doing tasks that demand their attention and focus. But if they are aware of their ADHD, they can work around it or with it to produce desired results. It's easier to move in the right direction when you have a map; it's easier to avoid pitfalls when you know what to look for. Essentially, an exercise in understanding your facticity is about knowing your map and obstacles so you can chart the best path.

Remember, facticity is not only about external things, like the country you are born in. It can be internal things, like your genes, talents, and predispositions—anything you are born with. The ADHD example shows this, but keep in mind that not all elements of facticity are negative. They range from neutral things to things about yourself that are special talents. You already know what you are good at, what comes easily to you, and what you struggle with. Those things may be a combination of innate characteristics (facticity) and experience.

# CHAPTER 4:

## FOCUS AND ATTENTION

The ability to focus and pay attention is invaluable in a society that always tries to catch our attention. We will look at how we can use all we have learned to be more focused. It is not that hard, believe me. Focus and attention are sides to the same coin. We often use attention to denote listening and focus to denote doing mental work—very similar things but with different priorities. We will begin by talking about focus, and then turn to attention.

### **Focus**

To get ourselves to focus and be more productive, we need to understand why we can't seem to focus, and why we feel like we never have enough mental energy to get things done. The obvious answer to the problem of concentration is distractions. There are things that get in the way of us staying focused, but focusing is not about getting rid of distraction, it is about brain state and habit. Let's discuss the main reasons why you struggle to concentrate and what you can do to fix them.

There are four broad reasons why we can't focus: cues, environment, focus budget, and conflicting goals.

### **Cues**

The most important and pervasive reason that people struggle with concentrating has to do with cues in our environment. Remember that your mind's job is to always predict what will happen next, and part of that prediction model is loading the relevant shortcuts and solutions that match the prediction. The shortcuts are your habits.

The example is, even when you don't think about it consciously, when your mind sees a door handle, it thinks "It's for turning to open doors" and starts the process of doing the action. The doorknob is the cue, the prediction is that it closes and opens doors, and the habit is the action you take in response to that prediction. Your mind does this all the time about the things it hears, sees, or feels. For instance, when your mind sees an open book, you start the sequence for reading. All this happens in the background.

A cue makes it easy for you to want to do something because it puts it in your mind for you. You don't have to spend energy trying to convince yourself to act in a desired manner.

We have all experienced the power of cues. Imagine you want to get some work done. You open your computer, but you have forgotten what you wanted to do. Your desktop background is of an idyllic village in Europe. You wonder where that is and before you know it you have opened your browser and you are looking at similar pictures and starting to think about your plans to travel to Europe. In the small window when you forgot what you wanted to do, your brain went with doing whatever was in front of it, which was idyllic villages and everything related to your desire to travel. If this happens to you, you will know as you ask yourself, "What did I want to do?" You answer yourself only to find that you are not in the mood to do what you wanted to do, or it feels harder to stop what you are doing to focus on the thing you wanted to do.

If you mindlessly open your phone, chances are you will click one of the applications on the screen. If you go on YouTube, chances are you will watch whatever is on your home screen. If you open your computer, chances are you will do the thing that is the most apparent. All these icons, pictures, and sounds are suggestions that constantly tell your brain, "Hey, do this!" Your brain responds by choosing the easiest and the most reliable or familiar action.

It is difficult to read while your friend is whispering in your ear, "Let's go out and party. It's Saturday!" But we often try to do the equivalent with our spaces and how we organize things in our life.

For instance, you can't study while you are playing music you normally listen to when you are at the club. It will make it harder for you to concentrate and be productive. Every time your brain hears that music, it's the equivalent of someone whispering in your ear to do something more festive. It is harder to open your phone and read when the first applications that greet you are Twitter and TikTok. It's easier to open your computer and work if when you turn it on, a document or productive software is already opening instead of a YouTube webpage. All these things are whispering and suggesting, and you have to work harder to resist them.

There is no such thing as bad cues and good cues. What makes a cue bad or good is whether or not it supports what you want to do. For you to be able to focus on any tasks, you will have to be mindful of the bad cues for those tasks—the cues that make it harder for you to do the task.

Let's say you want to focus on coding. You will get rid of cues that suggest doing other tasks instead of coding. You start by disabling notifications on your phone that cue you to go on social media. You may set up your phone so that the only notifications you get are coding-related news, discussions, and newsletters. On your computer, you will remove shortcuts on your desktop that are for games, and you can set the homepage of your browser to be a coding website like GitHub. When you listen to podcasts, you will select podcasts that are about coding. You will set up your computer so that the first programs you see on your taskbar or desktop are coding related. Why? Because your brain will be inundated with suggestions to code even when you don't feel like it.

If you want to read more, it would be best to fill your environment with reading cues. You can always have an open book on your desk. You can follow book blogs on social media, you can listen to book podcasts, and you can have reading programs pinned to your taskbar. That means often, your brain will make a prediction for reading and ready you for reading, helping you to reach your goal. The system works by overwhelming your prediction model with one



task or goal, so as soon as you find the energy, it directs it to the reading goal.

All these cues maintain and reinforce the impulse to do one task. An easier path is to remove those cues that you struggle with the most so you will do those things less. If you struggle with Twitter, remove the icon from your home screen and disable Twitter notifications. If you struggle with gaming too much, remove those notifications that are related to games, as well as shortcuts on your desktop and taskbar, and replace them with the ones for things you want to do.

If you are planning to read when you first wake up, have the book you want to read by your bed. Put your phone in the living room when you go to bed so when you wake up, the cue to read is the loudest and the easiest to fulfill. All the other tasks, like listening to podcasts about reading and spending more time in reading-related communities, are there to make it easier to do the thing. Some days you will wake up and not feel like reading. It's okay. Just do something reading related, like listening to a book review podcast or reading Reddit threads about books, or listen to an audiobook. Before you know it, you will pick up that book and read it.

As we go along, we will add more strategies; this is just one piece. The beauty of this method is that it removes temptations and encourages you to do the thing you want to do.

## **Environment**

Your environment has cues in it, but it also makes it easier or harder to focus. Ask yourself this: Why is it easier to study when you are in the library than at home? You haven't changed, so what has changed? The obvious answer is your environment. What is it about a library that makes you study more? It's because your library is filled with other people who are doing the same thing, it is quiet, and it's a socially expected thing to study in the library. It's harder to do other things in a library, like sing, because that behavior is not encouraged. The library demands a specific set of behaviors and

when you are there, you have little choice but to engage in those behaviors.

A library is an extreme but poignant example of how an environment can empower us to focus. Our homes are not so clear, and they accommodate a wide range of behaviors. In your living room, there isn't a very limited range of behaviors that are encouraged. You can party in your living room. You can read. You can watch TV. You can sleep, and you can host guests. Our homes are like this. They aren't churches, workplaces, restaurants, or bars.

Our own spaces can be sculpted in ways that suit our purposes best. Despite the knowledge we now have about the impact the environment has on our behavior, we often overlook the importance of maintaining our environment to make sure it fits with the goals we hold dear.

We need to be judicious and experimental with our environment. Remember, we don't all respond the same way to similar environments. Some people can't study in a library because it is too quiet, or they get self-conscious. Some people find it easier to focus in a coffee shop, with people bustling about and background music. We are all unique, and what may be a distraction to you may not be for the next person. So when thinking of an environment that is conducive to mentally intensive work, you need to experiment. Find an environment that works for you, take note of the characteristics of that environment, and replicate them whenever you need to sit down and focus on work.

I find that my concentration levels are higher at night when most people are asleep. During that time, concentrating for long stretches is easier and I often get so absorbed in my work that I sometimes struggle to disengage. That is the time when I am most productive, but I noticed that there are significant differences in my environment at night than in the morning. In the morning, there is a lot of ambient noise. The TV is on, someone's listening to something, there is traffic outside, my mailbox is popping, and my phone goes off more often.

There is just a lot more activity that my mind has to work harder to filter it out so I can focus.

To focus the mind, you have to deliberately ignore and filter out things that will distract you. In a busy environment, the mind works harder to filter out information because there is simply more information to ignore. Also, if you have a lot of things that you have to get done, or things to worry about, the mind has to work harder to put those concerns aside so you can focus. Those concerns may be as simple as feeding the dog on time or answering an email from a colleague. All this activity is taxing the energy resources of your mind, so you have little left to put toward the task you want to focus on.

At night, it's often quieter and no one is sending me emails, nor do I have to worry about doing errands or answering messages. All these things were taken care of in the business of the day. At night, I have no responsibilities. My mind has an easier time focusing on what I need to get done. The reason why this works, for me, is because I am a night owl. For some people, at that time of night, when I am most productive, they are too sleepy to be able to take advantage of the tranquil environment the night offers (may I suggest early morning hours for them?).

I conducted an experiment. I started blocking all communications on all my devices in the first three hours after waking up. I closed the door to my office space and urged everyone I lived with to keep things quiet and not to bother me with anything (no matter how silly or urgent) within those three hours. I noticed how, with these measures, I was able to focus just as well as I do at night. But the nighttime is better because I don't have to work to shut everybody out.

You need to pay attention to aspects in your environment that may be hindering your focus. To find this out, you will have to experiment with different conditions until you find what works best for you. When you have found it, get into a routine that signals to your brain that it is time to take advantage of the environment you

have created for yourself. Don't be afraid to change scenery. In my experience, I find every person has many spots and environments that work for them. It's not always one setup.

### **Focus Budget**

The focus budget is how much mental work you can truly handle in a day. Outside of that limit, you become increasingly unproductive and inefficient. This is different from how long you can focus on a task in one stretch. For instance, you may be able to focus on a task for 30 minutes at a time but have a focus budget of five hours per day. That means you can do 10 30-minute focus sessions a day.

The focus budget is affected by a few factors that affect brain health and sharpness. These factors are diet, exercise, sleep, and stress (Medina, 2018). If you want to be able to focus more, tweaking the aforementioned factors is your best bet. Attempting to focus and work for longer periods of time without tweaking those aspects will result in failure. Working past your budget is like trying to buy something you can't afford—it doesn't work.

The question is: What is your focus budget? Answers vary, but they all point to a similar ballpark. Most people can only focus for between three to six hours a day, depending on the task. According to some surveys, workers in the office only focus for an average of 2 hours, 23 minutes a day (vouchercloud, 2019). In his book *Rest*, author Alex Soojung-Kim Pang (2016) looked at various highly successful figures and found that they worked about four hours a day. Carl Newport's *Deep Work* (2016) seems to think the same way. A lot of studies are settling on the idea that three to five hours of work (actually concentrating on a demanding task) is optimum.

When a lot of people go to work for a nine-to-five job, a lot of what they do is shallow, insignificant busywork that does not produce any value, and the real work gets done in three to four hours of the time they spent at work. A lot of time goes to chatting with colleagues, making beverages, going to meetings, social media, downtime, distractions, communication, and a myriad of other

things that pop up while on the job. This detail has led people to conclude that most of us have the same focus budget, and pushing past it results in diminishing returns. There is certainly now a lot of data to support the idea. People are different, and some people will have a bigger focus budget than others. It's no big deal. You must find yours and learn how to work with it. Try to do something to increase your budget so you can get more done. Now, let's turn to the four factors that influence your focus budget.

Your situation will affect your focus budget. If you are living in a stressful situation, your focus budget shrinks. This is because your brain's resources are divided, and certain chemicals get released in your body that are dangerous in the long term. For instance, if you are worried about making rent, you won't be able to focus as freely as when you don't have to worry about rent. The stress becomes a mental weight. Any kind of stress will have this effect on your focus budget. You will have to find ways to lower your stress levels overall. If it means saying no to extra commitments, delegating tasks, or setting aside 'me' time, do it.

A good diet and exercise has been shown to help with good brain functioning and sharpness. If you are not active and don't eat well, your brain doesn't work at its absolute best. The physical activity that your brain demands doesn't have to be strenuous; it can be as simple as brisk walking. If the activity gets blood flowing, it is good; even stationary jogging will do the job. It doesn't have to take up a lot of your time, either. Your brain loves it when you eat well, like the Mediterranean diet, and eat enough (recommended calorie intake for your sex and age). Your brain likes snacks, too, just keep them healthy and controlled. After all, the brain is also an organ in your body, so it works a lot better when the body is taken care of.

Sleep is the most important. If you don't get enough sleep, your focus budget will shrink a great deal. The benefits of sleep cover almost every area of our life. The benefits of sleep are plenty. People who don't get enough sleep have a weaker immune system, they have higher health risks such as cardiovascular disease, heart

attacks, stroke, diabetes, brain diseases, and psychological disorders, and they have shorter life spans. Just sleeping enough can improve all those things or prevent them. So, I would say, above all else, you should protect your sleep and sleep enough, which is about 7.5 hours of sleep for most adults. Here are a few tips for better sleep:

1. **Get rid of alarms for waking.** If you have an alarm that wakes you, get rid of it. If you are afraid that you will oversleep, sleep earlier so you don't have to worry about waking up late. If you are so worried about your ability to wake up on time, maybe you are sleeping too late. Your body will wake you when it's rested. Trust it. Forcing your body awake is not good.

If you don't know how to sleep earlier, start with 30-minute increments. If you normally go to bed at midnight, try going to bed at 11:30. You can set an alarm to remind you to get ready for bed around 11:10 p.m. Do that and dial back until you find the perfect spot.

2. **Avoid coffee in the afternoon.** Don't drink coffee in the afternoon, as it will make it harder to fall asleep. Even if you have no trouble going to bed after drinking coffee, caffeine can affect the quality of your sleep. Sleep quality and quantity are both important for unlocking the full benefits of sleep.
3. **Don't smoke marijuana or drink at night.** Marijuana and alcohol may make you feel sleepy, but they don't give you natural sleep. They sedate you, which is not the same thing as sleep. You won't wake up feeling rested. If you have to drink and smoke, do it many hours earlier so that when you go to bed, a lot of it is out of your system.
4. **Don't take sleeping pills.** Do what you can to get sleep naturally. Sleeping pills sedate you, they don't induce sleep. So do whatever you can to fall asleep naturally. I always go to bed with a book. I find after two or three pages at night, I get sleepy and then I put the book away and sleep. Don't use your phone as a substitute, as it can keep you awake instead of helping you sleep.

5. **Don't nap in the late afternoon.** The reason is that the longer you are awake, a chemical called adenosine builds in the brain. The more it builds up, the sleepier you become. It accumulates in the brain, building a pressure that can only be resolved by sleep. When you nap in the late afternoon, you remove some of that pressure and by the time you need to go to bed at night, you will be struggling to sleep (Walker, 2018).

To maintain a healthy focus budget, you need to pay careful attention to these factors. If you have more in the tank, you will be able to go farther. Many of the other things we will talk about in this section assume you have a healthy focus budget to work with. It's absolutely essential to get this right.

### ***Conflicting Goals***

Another feature of the focus budget is focus quality. Conflicting and competing goals will have an adverse effect on the quality of your concentration, no matter how long you can concentrate. In other words, people do better when they are focused on one or a few things at a time. The human brain is not capable of multitasking. When you multitask, the quality of your concentration drops drastically and your brain works a lot harder to make sense of fewer details.

Taking on many projects or responsibilities can have the same effect on the quality of your concentration. If you want to study but at the back of your mind you have to also figure out how you are going to prepare for a separate exam, the quality of your concentration will be diminished. Although you are not multitasking, your brain is trying to do two things at the same time. The same applies to any domain in your life.

The only way to fix this is to try to do one thing at a time and never overbook yourself. Ensure you never run out of time or find yourself in a situation where you must cram many things in a short space of time. In other words, you have to be judicious with your time and the amount of work you take on. Don't take more than you can

chew; know your limits and stick to them. Your mental energy will be used most efficiently and you will be more productive this way.

## **Building a Focus Habit**

The main goal of doing all we have talked about is so you are able to work consistently without a great deal of effort on your part. In other words, you want to make focusing a habit. We have seen the cumulative effects of habits, which makes them desirable if you want big, long-lasting change. In this section, I want to guide you through that process. Remember, the assumption here is that you have taken care of cues, environment, focus budget, and conflicting goals.

Starting a new habit always begins with a goal: I want to run a marathon; I want to listen to 100 albums this year; I want to read 50 books. Here, your goal is to be able to focus. It will be unique to each person. Some people may want to focus on demanding tasks six hours a day. Some people may simply want to be more consistent in their ability to focus. The trick to starting long-lasting habits is by beginning small, with a modest goal that requires little effort. The goals should be so small and simple that you can't come up with an excuse not to do it.

Small, simple goals get rid of your reliance on motivation (positive urge to do something) and pave the path to consistency (doing something more often) (Fogg, 2020). Once you have consistency, you will have a habit (a mental shortcut that simplifies doing the thing) which leads to accumulating benefits and more consistency until you reach your potential. Remember that the brain has a bias against demanding things—it wants to preserve energy unless it is completely necessary to use it—so when you keep your goals simple, you bias the brain toward doing that thing.

But you see, the simple goal is a trick that hacks into your brain's prediction function. Once the brain gains momentum, it often wants to do the things a bit more until it gets bored or decides to stop. When you keep your goals simple, you hope your brain will build



momentum via its prediction model and experience no resistance in working toward your goal.

For instance, if you want to stop procrastinating, stop telling yourself, “You want to focus for an hour.” Your brain looks at that and thinks, “An hour? No way. I am a bit too tired for that now. How about we do that later when I feel a little refreshed?” An hour is a big task, and many people can’t focus for an hour at a time. Your brain usually does better with breaks. If you want to concentrate on a task for an hour, don’t make that your goal. Make it simple, something like “I will focus for five minutes, if after five minutes I don’t want to do it, I will stop and try again in 30 minutes.” Five minutes is easy. You won’t even notice it go by and by then, you will feel like just doing a little bonus work. It doesn’t matter if you do the bonus work for 15 minutes or an extra minute, just make sure you stop when you feel like you should.

I use the five-minute rule and it has transformed how I approach any goal I may have. Below is an example of what my daily to-do list looks like:

- Read for five minutes.
- Write for five minutes (between 12 p.m. and 7 p.m.).
- Code for five minutes.
- Put on walking shoes.
- Do one pushup.
- Wash a dish.

If you saw this list, you might say I am not serious at all. How can I get stuff done if I am only doing things for five minutes? Honestly, though, I don’t think I would get much done without these simple goals. Let’s pick writing.

When I sit at my desk to write at 12 p.m., I am not thinking about how many hours I have to write or how many words I need to write. I get rid of that stuff. My only goal is to sit down and type for five minutes. What begins to happen is that by the five-minute mark, I am engrossed in my work and there is plenty I want to do. I usually

work until my brain says I should stop. I don't force anything. Sometimes the command from the brain comes in 30 minutes. Some days it comes in 1 hour and 11 minutes. What should I do next? I take a break. My rule is that my break should not involve doing anything that can take hours away from me, like gaming. Between 12 p.m. and 7 p.m., I don't do anything like that. It's a rule. So I usually go outside, chat to people in the house, take a short walk, or run a quick errand.

When I get back, my goal is not to write for another hour. It's just to work for five minutes. That's it. That five minutes usually turns into a big chunk. By 7 p.m., on average, I have worked for four hours, and I have done all my work for the day. The rest is spent doing shallow work or resting. I get a lot done this way. If I woke up each morning with the thought "I have to write 2,000 words in four hours," I would not get anything done. That is too daunting a task. The five-minute rule is how I get dishes done, my work, code, get exercise, and read around 40 books a year.

You might say between 12 p.m. and 7 p.m., I have three hours that just go to waste. Wouldn't it be better if I worked more than that? The mistake that people make when they make this argument is that they forget that the deep brain continues working on a problem after you stop consciously working on it. This way, it is able to make progress where you couldn't and find novel solutions. Haven't you noticed that after taking a break—a real break, not playing a mentally demanding game—you often return to your work feeling much more capable, and the stuff you were struggling with comes easier? Haven't you also noticed that sometimes when you are on a break, the answer to your problems pops into your head or you suddenly think of a new strategy that wasn't so obvious while you were working? That is because the deep brain was at work while you were doing nothing. But for it to get to work, you have to do some work and give it space to work by taking a break. So that seven hours is all productive in my mind, even when it sometimes didn't feel like it.

All of this works because I have kept my habit very simple, but the results are so big that you wouldn't guess that this is how I do things.

The second step, which I have already hinted at, is to "block out" time in the day to focus on the thing you want to focus on. In my example of writing, I blocked out 12 p.m. to 7 p.m., but sometimes this changes depending on my commitments. You can block out three hours or two hours at a time. For instance, some days I do 12 p.m. to 2 p.m., and 10 p.m. to 12 a.m. The time you block out simply means you won't do things that will take up a lot of your time, so you avoid social media and gaming, and if you take a break, do something else, like petting your dog. When you get back from your break, your goal is always to focus for five minutes and stop when you feel like stopping. If after five minutes you don't want to carry on just a little bit, you can stop there. You have reached your goal. You have engaged in the habit. Don't worry about progress, just focus on doing the habit no matter how small.

It's best to think of this period as the time when you put your vices away. When I think of it as a time when I put my toys away and allow myself to get mildly bored, it's not that terrifying. It helps to put your phone on silent, Do Not Disturb, or only allow specific apps to send notifications. On your computer, try blocking all nonessential notifications. Some people do better when they put their phone in the other room and only check it during breaks. You will slip up now and then, just remember that doesn't mean the whole effort is ruined. I still have times when I stop to check messages and end up reading an unrelated article for 10 minutes. That doesn't undo the fact that I have made some progress. And that is something you will need to get accustomed to: not fretting about any mistakes you make or disruptions and focusing on the gains. If someone visits unannounced, don't get upset. Host them, as long as it's appropriate, and get back. When time is up, you have done what you can. Having done something is the point. Your focus habit will grow and you will see its benefits in the long run. It's a marathon, not a sprint.

An all-or-nothing attitude is a surefire way to fail. Avoid it at all costs. After all, if you have done three five-minute sessions of work, you have done three times more than you had planned. Be proud. I know it sounds stupid but trust me, the mental shift is an essential part of building a lasting habit.

Reward yourself, just don't do it during breaks. The reason why this advice often falls flat is because most people try to reward themselves with a vice or habit they struggle with during breaks. For instance, if you struggle with gaming, you focus for five minutes and reward yourself with a game, but what ends up happening is that one game turns into the whole afternoon. So, reward yourself with something you are looking forward to, but only after you have gone through the blocked-out period. Even if you feel good about the focus session you just had, don't reward yourself with a game if you need a break, just do something less absorbing and time consuming. You can even nap for 15 minutes (you use an alarm this time), watch clouds, or go outside to play with your dog.

Remember, you can reward yourself, but don't punish yourself. If you do just one session and you made mistakes, forgive yourself and stick to rewarding yourself at the time you planned. If the reward was watching a movie you have been meaning to see at 9 p.m., do it. And remind yourself why you are doing it. For instance, I would think, "I reached all my goals today, and now I get to watch *The Matrix* in peace."

The question I often get after I tell someone all this is: "What do I do when I just have a bad day where I wake up and binge watch series until it is past my block-out period?" If you have done five minutes, even just one session, you have done your job. And just because most of your day is gone doesn't mean all of it was gone or that it's wasted. Just focus on the fact that you said you were going to focus for five minutes, and you did it.

The "many yous" thinking is important to hold on to in this situation. The day is long and your mood and fortunes can change. You might not be able to bear doing work now, but you will snap

out of the stupor of procrastination—nothing lasts forever, after all. The mistake that some of us commit is thinking how we feel now is how we will feel throughout the day. That attitude prevents you from acting differently when the opportunity presents itself. That trust in yourself is essential when things get difficult and uncertain. You won't always have space and time to do what you planned, but knowing you can rely on yourself will allow you to adapt and keep the habit alive.

One day, you will wake up and your pet will be ill and you will need to drop everything to get it the care it needs. Nothing about that day will go how you had planned, but it won't go to waste. Later that day you might be exhausted, but you know what? You will still have the time and energy to focus for five minutes. Just knowing that and doing it will build the confidence and trust you need to weather a hectic day in the future and still get things done by the end of the day.

I log the amount of time I spend in deep focus on spreadsheets, seven days a week. Here is how one week looks:

5.4 4.9 4.7 0.5 1.5 4.2 3.5

I was in deep focus for a total of 25.2 hours that week. That is, excluding the amount of shallow work I had to do when I wasn't doing deep work. Something else I don't count are my coding hours. I consider that a hobby at this point, so I don't put it in, although it does require me to concentrate and solve problems. I also don't count the amount of time I spend reading books. I guess if you added them, that number would be as high as nine hours sometimes. That leaves plenty of time to watch TV and play games, believe me.

Notice how on some days, I only worked for half an hour or an hour and a half for two consecutive days. There was nothing going on those days, I was just in a slump, but look at how I managed to get some work done. I wasn't miserable about how I performed those days, and the reason is simple: I knew what mattered is that I did do

something, and that is what allowed me to eventually go back to the same numbers. That is what consistency looks like. Consistency is all about doing the thing, not about how much or how big. When you have that consistency, you begin to expect yourself to produce and stay focused. It's when you reach that point that a lot of this becomes natural.

Of course, going back to re-engage with a difficult task, even for five minutes, will feel daunting sometimes, but force yourself. Five minutes is not that bad. Remember, a behavior becomes a habit once it has been repeated often enough. If you want to focus and get more done, focus on just doing, not how much you are doing, and make it as easy as possible. The rewards will show themselves, and by then you won't want to stop.

Another tip is allow yourself to get bored. In your breaks, it's okay to get bored, and it's okay to feel so bored that you feel like taking a short nap instead of doing any other activity. You see, when we are focused on a task, a different part of our brain is active, the one that allows us to maintain the mental effort. When you get bored, wander, daydream, do chores, or other less focus-intensive tasks, different regions of your brain become active. These regions are called the Default Network Mode. During this time, your brain can freely associate between ideas and make connections you can't make when you are busy focusing on a task, so a lot of work happens. Activities like lying down, taking a walk, doing the dishes, cooking, playing with your dog, socializing (online or offline), listening to music, watching TV, or watching clouds activate the Default Mode Network (DMN). Anything passive will do the job. Napping activates both the networks involved in your conscious experiences and the DMN, allowing you to make better connections and more.

As a result, when you return to your desk, you feel refreshed and full of new ideas. The value of embracing boredom is the key to being more efficient. Sitting at your desk working for hours won't increase your efficiency or creativity, but taking breaks that seem pointless and boring will. Sometimes that five-minute focus session

turns into an hour and a half, and I feel so wiped that I just want to close my eyes and nap for 15 to 20 minutes. I nap, and I don't even have to fall asleep. That area between mind-wandering and falling asleep is just as powerful. I do it. When I open my eyes again, I start another five-minute session, which usually turns into a bit more than that. All those starts and stops after a period of inactivity build up to those numbers I showed you earlier.

If you have tried various productivity hacks in order to focus, you might have come across the pomodoro technique. Basically, you pick a task and set a timer for 25 minutes. You do the task until the time is up. Then you take a five-minute break. You repeat that cycle four times (four pomodoros) and then you take a break for 15 to 30 minutes. You can repeat this process as many times as you want. You can change the focus session of your pomodoro to fit your needs. For instance, you can do a 45-minute focus session and a 14-minute break. Repeat that twice and take a longer break of an hour.

Some people swear by this method. As you will notice, this is more of a method for focusing than a habit-building strategy. I have personally tried to use the pomodoro technique with varying levels of success. If it works for you, you can give it a shot, but if you want to build a long-lasting habit, I don't think it's the right place to start. Why? That 25 minutes of focus is a little too steep for someone struggling to focus. I have found in my experience that I hate timers. They make me feel miserable. I constantly look at the time to see how much time has passed only to be disappointed, and I feel like the breaks go by too quickly. I am someone who focuses almost every day, and I can't stand using this method. I think it is useful for people who have a proclivity for structure in their life. If you are trying to build a lasting habit, I'd just make it very simple or use it only when necessary.

What about getting an accountability partner? Getting an accountability partner is a popular way of making sure you stick to new habits, but it's not necessary. You shouldn't need it if you follow everything I have shared with you here. It will come down to what

you are comfortable with. You can get one if you want, but you don't have to.

I suggest that you don't use timers, even for the five-minute session. Use a stopwatch or install activity-tracking apps on your computer. When you have an activity-tracking app on your machine, you don't have to keep track yourself. All you have to do is open the app and start working until you feel like you are satisfied. The app will tell you how much time you spent working when you open it. A stopwatch is a good tool because it counts up and it can go on and on. It won't beep when a certain amount of time has elapsed, which breaks your momentum. You can start it and put it aside until you are done.

## **Attention**

Let's look at some ways you can improve your attentiveness. Like I said earlier, attentiveness is all about listening; listening to others, media, and the world around you. Unlike focusing, attention falls more on the passive side of things. That is why, unless something is stimulating, you struggle with paying attention.

You see, attention is about consuming, not doing, and some people struggle to consume if the thing they are consuming fails to interest them. It's easier to pay attention to something if it interests you in some way. If you are worried about something, you will pay attention to it, and if you are entertained by something, you will pay attention to it. Both these things interest you in a way that commands attention. The reason why these things command our attention is because they invoke a strong emotional reaction. Whether they are important as well is merely a coincidence. We evolved to be good at paying attention to things that are important for our survival, and the reason they get emotional responses from us is because our bodies are readying us for an appropriate reaction to those things. For instance, when you see a predator, you experience fear and the fight-or-flee response kicks in.



In the complex civilization we live in, not all things that elicit a strong emotional reaction from us are important to our survival, although they may be related to deep survival instincts. For instance, news about a celebrity couple breaking up and the subsequent Twitter threads. Technically speaking, unless it's your job, this news is not important for your survival or well-being, but it may elicit a strong emotional response that commands your attention. If you love a sport, something similar is true. You can pay attention to a match with no effort but might struggle to listen to anyone trying to talk with you, unless that talk is about the match.

It's easy to pay attention to something when it's both important to us and elicits an emotional response. If you are accused of a crime and a police officer pays you a visit, you will surely pay attention to everything the officer says. Why? You don't want to end up in prison, and that situation is worrying.

The problem is, we need to pay attention to a lot of things in our life that don't do those things. You need to listen to your friends when they talk to you. What they say won't always elicit an emotional response or be important to you, but you have to. You need to pay attention in work meetings, although most of what happens won't be relevant to you. You have to pay attention in class, although you don't see the importance of arrays and algorithms yet. Why? Because you want to be a good employee, a good friend/spouse, or a good student. But it is harder to pay attention when the importance isn't always apparent and the emotions we need are not there. That is why our mind wanders, or we shift our attention to something that may give us the response we want. So how can you pay more attention when you need to despite a lack of these elements?

Humans are very good at paying attention when they are participating in something. You don't need to trick yourself to pay attention, you just need to be active in how you pay attention. For instance, if you struggle to pay attention in a meeting, chances are, you are going to that meeting as a passive observer. Imagine that you had to present an idea at the meeting. You are probably going to

be paying attention to what everyone is saying in that meeting. Participating increases response and importance in a way that improves attention.

Let's talk about how you can use that strategy in two situations: in a group of people or with an individual. The point is to participate in the conversation or in the information being given to you instead of being passive.

### **Ask Questions**

Listen with the intent of asking a question. You can ask a question if you missed something, you think something is confusing, or you want to know why certain information is introduced.

Say your friend is telling you a story and you wonder why they are telling you the story; you can ask. Just don't be rude or say it bluntly. Here are some suggestions:

*Is this related to what we were talking about earlier?*

*Wait, does something crazy happen?*

*Is this a love story?*

Once they respond, your brain will build a list of cues and things to look out for. It's the equivalent of doing word search puzzles but with conversation details. You will be more engaged. You can express your confusion, too:

*I don't understand. I thought you said this was who didn't like rock climbing?*

*How does that make sense?*

You might think it makes you look like you don't listen, but it doesn't. It shows that you have been thinking about what your friends have told you. That you are paying attention. Sometimes what your friend wants is rapport. Maybe they are confused, too, and they want you to be confused with them.

In a group, whether it's a meeting or a class, ask questions. If you make it your goal to at least have one question in a meeting, you will pay attention. When I am struggling with the importance of a meeting, lecture, or any sort of presentation, I always try to ask why it matters. Of course, I don't use those words. I have used: "What are the main concerns we will be dealing with?" If you don't want to interrupt a meeting or presentation to ask, ask someone before the meeting who might know. That way, you go into the meeting with something to look forward to.

Just ask questions.

### **Confirm**

Another way to participate in conversation is to confirm your understanding. Basically, you summarize and paraphrase what someone has told you and repeat it back to them to ensure that you really understood what they were saying. You would be surprised by how much we take for granted in conversation with people. We normally think we understand what a person is saying until we test it.

Here is an example of how a response like that sounds: "He exercised and took care of his health, and he was the last person you'd expect to speak ill of science or the medical establishment, so it surprised you when you found out he wasn't taking his heart medication. Am I right?"

You need to listen with the intent of doing something similar if you have no questions and you want to pay attention. Formulating a response like that forces you to engage with what the person is saying and increases your emotional response because you are trying to put yourself in their shoes instead of being passive.

### **Add**

Listen with the intent of commenting on what is being shared with you. Intent is important, as the formulation of an opinion is based on what is being shared with you. As soon as someone speaks to you

and you have that intent in mind, it should be easier to pay attention.

Unlike listening with the intent of expressing your viewpoint, this rule requires you to actually pay attention to what someone else is saying, because you are not making it about you.

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These three tips work best when you keep reminding yourself of the intent to question, confirm, and add whenever there is information being communicated to you and you need to pay attention. Forming that intention may be as simple as telling yourself: "When someone speaks with me today, I will question, confirm, and add to the conversation." You don't have to do them all in one encounter, and the situation will dictate which is more appropriate. Some situations will require more.

The last tip I want to share has to do with minimizing distractions. It's easy to understand what distractions are: They are things that diminish our ability to pay attention to one thing. Distractions are like unnecessary programs running on your computer hogging your system's resources while you are trying to do other tasks. Many of you know that if many programs are running on your computer at the same time, the performance of your machine drops. Your computer becomes sluggish. To get it performing at its best, you have to terminate unnecessary processes.

The same logic applies when you want to pay attention. There are things in your life and surroundings that try to compete for attention. You need to be able to recognize them and eliminate them when necessary. It's difficult to listen to your friend while you are watching an engrossing series. It's difficult to hold a meeting while there are children running in the background. But the biggest impediment to our ability to focus these days is our smart devices, more specifically mobile phones. So put your phone away when you need to pay attention, or any smart device that will demand your

attention. If you can't put it away, put it on silent. Knowing how often people check their phones, especially when they are on silent, it might be best to leave it behind. I advise you to experiment with the best way to do this.

## CHAPTER 5:

# OVERCOMING A LACK OF MOTIVATION

The advice we looked at in the last chapter is niche specific. That won't be the case with this chapter. Suffering from a lack of motivation denotes something more general: when you know there is something that is important to get done but you cannot bring yourself to get it done. In this situation, there is nothing driving you forward.

We mentioned in our extensive chat about motivation and the “many yous” philosophy that motivation does not disappear. What we mean when we use the word is a narrow idea of what being motivated is; namely, positive emotions that drive us to do something we think important to do. We also talked about how the problem of a lack of motivation is essentially a problem about having stronger goal-motivation bonds elsewhere. The most natural thing to think when you hear this is to assume that the fix is creating stronger goal-motivation bonds between the thing you think is important and your propensity to being motivated. Or, hopefully, decoupling some bonds or making them weaker, so you have no choice but to do the thing you think of as important. These ideas are a no-brainer; it is how you do it that is not so obvious.

Before we get into it, let's briefly describe the experience of losing your motivation. It feels like it comes out of nowhere and seems insurmountable. When the loss of motivation hits us, many of us just surrender to it and hope to snap out of it soon while we self-indulge. Sometimes we lose that motivation altogether and fall deep into old habits. Sometimes motivation comes back in a brief moment of respite, but it's usually not as strong as it was and rarely gets us where we want to be. At that point, giving up seems like the natural thing to do, because doing is hard, painful, and frustrating. Our

benefit assessment tells us it couldn't be worth it (what's objectively true does not matter at this point). The pattern is roughly similar, though not the goal.

## **The Solutions We Try**

When many of us experience this, our instinct is to rekindle the flame of motivation or keep the motivation alive. There is plenty of content online that is evidence of such behavior. Inspirational and motivational videos are the obvious examples of places where people flock to rekindle their flames.

I had a friend in college who was similar. He would insist on sharing these videos and speeches with me in an effort to get me motivated or inspired (using both words interchangeably here). They were pretty cringe and formulaic to me. They would show all this footage from movies, an inspirational speech, and swelling music in the background. These videos would get millions of views, and I have to admit that some of them were genuinely moving. I saw why they could give one a jolt to get something done. My friend's philosophy was that if he consumed enough of those videos while working on something, he could stick to it. But I watched him start and drop many things he claimed he really wanted to do. He would start out strong but slowly fall off until he couldn't be bothered. When the fall began consuming him, this type of inspirational material seemed to peak.

My friend's fault wasn't that he was not motivated; the motivation had died. He'd based his entire strategy to change on motivation, which wanes and waxes unpredictably. Let me illustrate.

Say you have a goal to do 10 pushups a day. Some days you will be very motivated and do 10 pushups no matter how difficult that is. Some days you will adequately be motivated to get it done, but since this is a new goal, that motivation will slip beneath the threshold needed to do 10 pushups a day. You will soon find it difficult to do

10 pushups, but it doesn't mean there isn't still some motivation to do pushups.

Trying to rekindle motivation takes many shapes and forms, but it's a strategy that focuses on the wrong thing.

"Many yous" thinking is paramount when setting goals; it's recognizing that you won't always be as motivated as you are right now. Anyone whose goal is formed with the realization that motivation wanes and waxes unpredictably, with more dry spells than not, is bound to make some important tweaks to their approach. When it comes to facing a lack of motivation, the problem isn't the lack of motivation itself but the disabling effects of less motivation. People wouldn't worry as much about motivation if they didn't rely on it to get things done.

## **Solutions**

Below are three solutions to this problem. The first two solutions are for prevention, and the last is about finding inspiration once you have lost it. The first two are built so you never have to be in that situation again.

### ***Simplicity***

If you were setting a goal with the "many yous" perspective in mind, how would you go about it? I imagine you would view your motivation as an oscillating wave, with ups and downs. From that information alone, you would surmise that any goal you set should be well below the lowest dip in the waves; that way, you never have to worry about losing motivation because you wouldn't need it to get things done anyway. What kind of goals fit that description? Things that are very easy to do.

Remember, habits take a long time to grow, and they form as a result of repetition. The aim here is to do the things you want to do consistently enough that they become habits. You don't need motivation for that.



Look, eventually you want to be the type of person who does 10 pushups a day, but that has to start with something so simple it can ride out the ups and downs of your motivation. You can opt for one pushup a day or two kneeling pushups a day. The element that makes a thing easy to do is not just the simplicity of the task but the steps you need to take before you can begin to do the task. All those steps present friction. The fewer steps there are, the easier it is to begin doing the task. The more steps in between, the harder it is to start, because at any point you can change your mind.

If you want to start running in the morning, you can reduce friction by going to bed in your running clothes and putting on your running shoes the first moment you wake up. Alternatives include having your shoes and running clothes by your bed so you can easily put them on the moment you wake up. While you reduce friction for the things you want to do, you need to increase friction for the things you don't want to do. If you don't want to scroll on social media wasting your precious time when you wake up, put your phone in the other room when you go to bed so that when you wake up, it's easier to put your gear on than to check your phone.

What about your simple goals? Your goal could be as simple as opening the door and looking outside. It doesn't have to be running. Remember that this hack works on your brain's propensity to predict behavior based on cues, which means some days you will choose to run simply because you are already prepared for it. The mind goes, "I already have my gear on and I am outside, might as well do it even for a little bit." Keeping the goal that simple and having as little friction as possible beats a reliance on motivation (Fogg, 2020).

This approach is momentum focused. It focuses on building momentum that then turns into a habit that you don't even think about consciously. Your goals should be about building momentum, not goal focused or motivation centric. Ease and less friction are momentum builders. Motivation-centric goals will wane with your motivation and eventually disappear.

## **Pairing**

The important part of trying to form a new habit is finding optimum space for it in your day. That space should allow you to do the task with ease and reliably. The best way to do this is to choose an activity that you do reliably and pair it with the new things you want to do. The task has to be a habit or behavior that you are guaranteed to engage in almost every day. If you always have a cup of coffee in the morning after you wake up, perhaps you can couple that with reading a book.

Why is pairing important? It reduces friction and plants the new habit in fertile ground. We all have rhythm, a daily routine that we follow that is roughly the same from one day to the next, with minor changes that have to do with responding to demands from our surroundings. Once we deal with all those unexpected demands, we fall back to our own rhythm and preferences. Rhythms stay more or less stable throughout long stretches of time, and they evolve slowly as we change and adapt to our changing situation and environment.

We experience no friction when settling into our rhythms; we think of them as our rest state, or “the way we just do things.” This is what makes pairing such a powerful strategy, because it piggybacks on your natural rhythm to introduce new behaviors. It is harder to adopt a new behavior if that behavior requires us to step out of our accepted routines to an inconvenient extent. For instance, it is harder to stick to going to the gym if every time you do, you have to give up two hours of your time, forfeiting some indulgences you have gotten used to. However, it’s easier to stick to going to the gym if it is cheap, right across the street, and takes less than 30 minutes out of your day. The latter works because it doesn’t interrupt your rhythm too much, meaning with time, the task may become an integral part of your rhythm.

Pairing comes with an understanding of something that most of us overlook when we think about changing our own behaviors: Any new behavior you adopt will have to coexist to fit comfortably with

your existing trends of behavior. Why? Because that allows for a seamlessness. When this happens, a new habit will grow and stay.

So you want to start a running habit. Say, when you get back from work, you change your clothes and sit in front of the TV. Why not change into your running outfit instead? Make that your goal. This works because it fits with something you are already doing. With any new habit or goal you are working toward, you can find fertile ground in your natural rhythms. The more fertile the ground, the higher your chances of success. In other words, the more regular and dependable the behavior you want to pair, the higher your chances of ingraining the new habit.

A habit that I do reliably as a result of this is weekend chores. While I do my weekend chores, I tend to socialize with friends and family. Usually, I am getting back to them because of their attempts to reach me over the week, and I use that time as an opportunity to catch up and reconnect. I do this on the phone or through text while I do mundane chores. On weekdays, my chores are accompanied by listening to podcasts or audiobooks. I find these activities come easily because I have planted them in fertile ground.

Remember that pairing doesn't mean these things have to happen together; they can happen after or before you do something that is normally in your rhythm. The trick is not to disturb that rhythm too much.

## ***Immersion***

The first thing you should do before trudging ahead is fix the obvious mistakes you have made when you set up your goals. Once you have done this, you can begin to work on finding your inspiration and learning ways of sustaining it. I have already given clues to how this works in earlier patterns. I call it 'immersion,' and it is the key to finding your passion again.

Immersion is exactly how it sounds, but instead of immersing yourself in the task or goal you want to do, you immerse yourself in all related activities and material to the goal you want to achieve. All

this immersion has to be of the time and frequency that does not significantly alter your rhythm too quickly. It's the peripherals you can live with while you go about your rhythm that keep the passion and the excitement for what you want to do at a healthy level.

How does it work? Well, imagine you wanted to be a programmer, so you have committed to learning to code for 30 minutes a day. You have kept at it for about a month, and now you have lost all the motivation you had when you started. Suppose you have read all the advice I have given in this book and you made some healthy changes, like pairing, the five-minute rule, and blocking out. It's been fine, but you don't want to be in the rut again and you are looking for something to keep your spirits up.

Your immersion would begin simply. You have to join a Discord community that is related to what you are doing. Participate in it at least once a day. Follow programmers online, watch related videos, and read related things. The aim of immersion is to immerse yourself in the work you want to be a part of as much as you can without upsetting the balance. So if you normally listen to a few new podcasts in the morning, maybe cut that one news podcast and replace the rest with tech-related podcasts. If you would normally just watch comedy clips on YouTube, maybe for half of that time watch something coding related. You get the point. It all has to be subtle, don't overdo it. Don't overwhelm yourself.

The reason why this works is that it builds toward a change in self-perception and triggers your prediction mechanism into keeping in mind your new goal, building anticipation. When you get back from work, you can put in that quick programming session. That is the beauty of immersion. Notice how it has nothing to do with motivational speeches or having to change your mental state; it is all about occupying the space that you want to move into.

Why am I insisting on keeping things as subtle as possible? Your brain evolved the patterns it has for the situation you are in because it determined that is the best way to do things. Those habits and routines form an integral part of that balance and sense of

familiarity. If you push too hard, your brain will push back. The brain wants what is easy and familiar, and drastic changes are never easy and familiar. So, the more you expose your brain to something in small doses, the more it will familiarize, and once it is familiar, it can be fully integrated or expanded. How will you know when it's time for the next stage? You will just do it and it will be natural. You won't even have to think about it too hard because the thing has ceased being new.

When my friend wanted to lose weight, he recognized the best thing he could do was adopt a healthier lifestyle and the rest would follow. He began small by eating one healthy meal a day and getting into his gym clothes once he got home, but he didn't have to go to the gym. He started reading on health and fitness and sometimes listened to podcasts. When I asked why he was doing all the reading, he said he was just curious and wanted to understand more about human health and fitness. Looking at all this, I saw the markers of all I had shared. In a way that wasn't obvious, he began eating well and staying active. He started doing all this not just because of the goal he had but because he started to see himself as someone who just cares about that stuff. His identity had changed. It only took him a year to achieve his goal, and he hasn't looked back.

That is the power of all these tools coupled with immersion. I have to tell you, when this was happening, it occurred so slowly, with small, almost insignificant changes, that I didn't recognize what was happening until it was close to the end. It almost felt like magic at that point. From my understanding, that is how habits—slow and small but powerful tweaks—can change a life. In my lifetime, I have never seen anyone who changed drastically over a short period of time and stayed that way over the long term. They almost always return to old habits when they get overzealous with change. My friend did all this six years ago, and he is still the same.

Let's talk about what immersion isn't a bit, because the message can get lost on some people. Immersion does not mean dedicating almost all parts of your life to that thing you want to do. That

wouldn't be wise, and also, it would be boring, and we are against being boring here. It means making small spaces in other areas of your life for things related to the thing you want to do.

## **Company**

You have probably heard this a lot at your age: The company you keep says a lot. That is because the company you keep matters a great deal. If you want to make a change that lasts and minimizes friction, consider making new friends.

We do not normally think about this, but any relationship we have comes with a set of behaviors that are encouraged or accepted, and some that are not. All these rules and expectations are often unsaid and are often discovered through observations, trial and error, or expressed values and ideals. That is why you always feel more comfortable talking about certain things and engaging in certain behaviors when you are with a particular friend than when you are with another.

You can say that your friends can create an environment and function as cues that will trigger certain behaviors more reliably than others. This is a double-edged sword. It's hard to be a slacker when all your friends are hard workers because you don't want to feel left out and you want to be able to relate to them. That is the positive side of it. But there is a negative side. For instance, it is harder to stop abusing drugs if you have friends who are addicts. Notice that it is about how easy and how hard it is to do certain behaviors. It's not about what's possible and what isn't. You can do those things, but you will encounter some friction.

We have already established that you want to make things easier for yourself. So, what does that look like when it comes to the company you keep? Well, you don't have to completely abandon your friend if you love them. That is hard in its own way. So, you would instead try seeing them less and replace that with spending time with people who you think are going in the direction you want to go. The good thing about this is how easy it is to make friends around a common

activity. The friendship doesn't have to be more than what brings you together, but it can be. What is important is that it keeps you committed to the activity.

One of the reasons that many of the online games today are so addictive is not just because they are fun and built to be that way, it's also because many gamers meet people and make friends that way. It's harder to log out and do something productive if your friends are asking you to log in for a game or two. The same logic works with productive things.

One of the best projects I have ever been a part of worked because of the friends I had made. I had friends who were involved and who were passionate about producing an awesome product. These people were not my beer and hangout friends, but they were my friends in that we were equally passionate and crazy about creating something together.

You don't have to force anything when you do this. The rest will be organic. The activity that brings you together will create a bond that keeps you committed. I have friends who keep me both honest and committed.

## CHAPTER 6:

### BUILDING RESILIENCE

I never make a lot of concrete plans. I make a few specific ones, like, “Let’s have a meetup on Saturday at 2 p.m.” or “Dinner at your house on Friday.” I never plan my days to the minute; I leave out blocks of time that serve a number of different purposes despite how I wish I could spend that time. That has allowed me to be productive. But why don’t I live by a full schedule like some people do? Because there is a lot that happens from one day to the next that is out of my control and can easily derail my plans if I overplan, so it makes sense to leave a pocket of time in my day that allows me to be flexible if such things occur. People who live by and follow completely full schedules, down to the minute, usually live in very controlled environments, away from the burden of existing in a complex, unpredictable, and demanding world.

A lot of people know this experience. That no matter how much they have planned, sometimes things happen that are out of their control. Your plans will be thrown, and at worst, the progress might be wiped away by an unpredictable turn of events. The pandemic has become a big lesson to us all in that regard. When such things happen, the situation and general state of things can get thrown and new kinds of systems and habits have to be formed to adapt. That makes things hard if you are trying to work toward something. What you need to have in uncertain times is resilience. This will allow you to keep to your goals and accomplish them in the midst of it all.

In layman's terms, resilience is the ability to get up again when you have been kicked down. It’s the refusal to give up. That sort of determination does not come about as a result of sheer willpower. It’s a character strength that can be developed. We all know this;



some people are more resilient than others. Less resilient people will often fold if things don't go how they expected; more resilient people will keep pushing. Resilience is the last piece of the puzzle because it will allow you to be successful and happier in life if you have it. The good news about resilience is that you don't have to do the mental equivalent of a thousand pushups to possess it. Anyone can have it with a few changes in how they choose to think and approach things. It's essentially an attitude hack.

Many of the solutions we have shared in this book already have an in-built mechanism for resilience. Why? Because we focused on building habits that are easy to stick to despite what is going on in your life. The focus of this chapter is going deeper into building psychological resilience for your overall spirit. It's the ultimate foundation of what is already a foolproof plan.

## **Essentials of Resilience**

The building blocks of resilience are straightforward, and they work together. You can't pick and choose; they all matter in their own way. Let's take a look at them.

### **Socialize**

One of the most important things for us here is to keep you interesting, but also happy and healthy. It's good to be productive and effective, but don't do it at the expense of the people you love. You need to keep healthy connections with friends, family, and others in your life alive and well. These relationships help regulate you and they function as your only real support system if life throws things at you. These are the obvious utilitarian reasons for this, but it also just feels good to have those connections.

In no way am I telling you to blow off important gatherings with your friends and family, to be ultra-productive, and to only enjoy them once you have achieved all you wanted to achieve. Social life is

as important as your health; it is not something you put off until you are successful.

One of the things that people who are too ambitious often say is, "I want to see my friends, but I just don't have the time." The general reply they get from impatient people is, "Well, make the time!" That's true. Make time for genuine human interactions. Make plans, schedule them, and stick to them. If you are so busy you can't make time for genuine human connections, you are playing a dangerous game. You are a human being before you are anything else you want to be.

### ***Stop Thinking in Absolutes***

Thinking in absolutes is a very limiting way of thinking. Its problem is that it is inflexible, and inflexibility means you can't adapt if things change. Life is not immune to change, and it's full of surprises. You, as a person, are also in a constant mode of flux, so it makes no sense to think in absolutes.

What does thinking in absolutes look like? It's full of words like "never" or "ever." For instance, you will hear people say things like, "I will never be able to do this!" They are always "either-or": "Either run the whole mile or nothing I have done matters!" It's black-and-white thinking with no room for nuance.

Absolute thinking is dangerous because it is blind to progress. In life, progress, no matter how small, is important. There won't always be clear wins or losses, but absolute thinking makes losses of all those situations, making it harder to stay positive. If you want to get anywhere, you need to pay attention to little victories because those are what accumulate until you get to where you want to be.

### ***Perspective***

Whatever happens, always learn ways of putting things into perspective. You can do this in a couple of dimensions: regarding time and relativity. Perspective regarding time is realizing that no matter how bad things are, things never stay the same. It won't

always be that bad, and some time from now, this will be in the past. It is stepping back and looking at the past, the present, and the future.

A relative perspective just means keeping in my mind that however bad things get, they could always get worse; not in a paranoid way but in a way that reminds you that the present situation is not the worst. Without putting things in perspective, we might be inclined to catastrophize setbacks. There is comfort in knowing that things aren't completely lost and something can still be done. Make that your attitude.

I developed my perspective through two things: listening to the stories of people who have had it worse than me and looking back at history/my past.

Another thing you can try is finding at least one positive thing in any bad situation. You have to challenge yourself to do so. If you don't challenge yourself, you will risk tricking yourself into believing there is nothing to be salvaged, and you will be totally beaten. I will tell you now, no situation, no matter how bad, is devoid of any opportunity or something positive.

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For my own resilience, I have used these ideas to varying degrees. I think my own resilience comes from the trust and confidence I have built within myself. If things go horribly wrong and I find myself in a tough spot, I just choose to have faith in my ability to get out of the situation and come out stronger. That faith is there because when I look back at my life, I find moments when I thought I couldn't, but somehow I made it through and became stronger. I will say, the side effect of living through difficult times is that at a certain point, you begin to have a much wider perspective of any challenge you face. You begin to trust in your ability to dig deep and prevail. When things are hard, try to find some faith in yourself. Trust me, it will grow with time.

## CONCLUSION

We have talked about a lot. It is a good thing to take a moment to try and put it all together lest we forget how it fits. I expect you have made your own notes and put together your own ideas based on what we talked about. However, if ever you need a place that sums it up for you, this is it.

We learned that the brain is essentially a prediction machine that carries out countless calculations, most of which you are not aware of. It uses this system to serve you your sense of reality but also to determine which behaviors or actions are the most appropriate. These prediction models help solve problems, and those patterns become stored as a shortcut, which is a habit.

Habits are mental shortcuts that form through repetition. Habits are often triggered by cues in our environment. Habits with a higher chance of sticking are those that are simple and beneficial. The purpose of habits is to simplify and automate tasks. Building good habits is desirable because habits allow us to be consistent, and consistency is what bears fruit. In the end, people are mostly the sum of their habits or that which they have done consistently for years.

Having understood this, we needed to reconcile and explain the problem of inconsistency in both our behaviors and the goals we keep. We needed to explain why we sometimes procrastinate or experience friction or fail to do certain things because we really want to do them. We needed to also define motivation's role in all of that. That is where we talked about the "many yous" concept: the idea that we always change and don't always have goals that are consistent with each other in both time and relevance. We noted that it's important to understand what those are for you and what influence they are having on your life. We closed that chapter by reminding ourselves that we need to be realistic and aware of our unique situation, so we don't get blinded by other people's success.

We didn't exactly use those words, but that is what we were getting at: Focus on yourself, and understand yourself.

Then we began moving to the application of those ideas. We started focusing. We learned that the mind's ability to focus deeply on a task is limited, and the best way for us to improve it or use it efficiently is by maintaining a healthy focus budget, getting rid of misleading cues and conflicting goals, and shaping our environment. We also learned if we want to build a consistent focus habit, we need to piggyback on the brain's prediction function to induce momentum. Then we moved to attentiveness. Attentiveness works when we are participating in what we are consuming, being emotionally or mentally stimulated. We learned if we wanted to be more attentive, we should participate more instead of being passive.

Then we looked at overcoming a lack of motivation and staying motivated. We noted that many problems with motivation stem from faulty goal-setting. Then we talked about how the secret to staying motivated and getting it back is not watching inspirational videos, not if you want a permanent fix. Keeping things simple, pairing activities, immersing yourself, and keeping the right company is the best way to go about it.

We closed with a quick talk on resilience, noting that all we've discussed will help you with resilience, but it is important to have mental tools for extra protection against the unpredictability of the world.

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# UNLOCKING THE DEEP BRAIN

OVERCOME THE LACK OF MOTIVATION  
AND TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR LIFE



Jason McClain