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Are you fully conscious, or do you have your head in the clouds?

New Delhi, Sep 10: How often has a social networking app notification distracted you from a task? With so many distractions in today's fast-paced, technologically advanced world, it's harder than ever to focus. Let's identify some daily digital distractions: A favourite celebrity is sharing a live video on Facebook; a close friend updated her Instagram story; there was a text message advertising a discount at a well-known company, a web browser news notification; and many email notifications.



Each audible phone signal stimulates the release of cortisol, the stress hormone. The cumulative effect of these microdoses harms our health, causing internal pressure and attentional deficits. There are other things that can get in the way, like kids, a spouse, or co-workers who talk a lot, etc.

What's the focus? Focus is the ability to concentrate on a task and avoid distractions. A focused mind ignores irrelevant thoughts and fully engages in an activity. Unfortunately, we entirely reject, overlook, and disregard focus when discussing the aspects of success. Malini shares signs of focus and lack of focus, a key aspect of success, along with motivation, creativity and network building.

Signs that you're focused

Focus affects life success, thus successful individuals never underestimate it. Like a laser beam, laser-focused individuals always concentrate their efforts on a single essential task. The following are signs of focused people

- * You pick your battles and avoid busy work so you can prioritise each action. For example as a writer, you sit down and write rather than waste time on formalities, as a chef, you prepare and experiment with flavours, as a working mother, you order food on the weekend to spend time with your kids, etc
- * You spend less time discussing future endeavours, past achievements and procrastination. You are more focused on future goals and continually seek to improve yourself
- * Your time is guarded. You refuse useless requests and tasks. Set aside time each day to focus on improving yourself and reaching your goals
- * You take regular breaks, care for your health and acknowledge that doing so helps your goals
- * Rather than going in guns blazing, you let your emotions get the better of you and keep your eye on the prize

Signs that you lack focus

Focus and concentration difficulties affect each individual differently. Some individuals struggle to concentrate at work or school, while others struggle to read or engage in other leisure pursuits. Common signs of lack of focus are

- * Incapability to undertake typical everyday activities
- * Restlessness
- * Cognitive haze or "brain fog"
- * Problems recalling events that occurred recently
- * Making choices is difficult
- * Energy deficit
- * Making careless mistakes
- * Missing crucial meetings, deadlines, and appointments, arriving consistently late to the office, school, etc
- * Inability to complete activities in a timely manner
- * Frequent instances of misplacing objects or forgetting where they are

Many times, tension, anxiety, and a feeling of being overloaded go along with not being able to concentrate. Malini adds simple tips to improve focus

- * No multitasking Working on one thing at a time" improves work quality and attention span. For example, don't text before a meeting or play video games while reading papers. Turn off videos when writing an important article and don't check your phone while someone is talking to you, as you'll miss something important and make the other person feel inconsequential. Working in 90-minute intervals followed by 20-minute breaks maximises productivity. Each of us has unique preferences and daily routines. Instead of rigidly sticking to the 90-20 model, change the times to fit your working mode while keeping the cycle of work and rest
- * Eliminate distractions Some distractions are unavoidable (like traffic noise), but others are self-imposed (like having your smartphone next to you at your desk at all times). Begin by setting your phone to silent and putting it in your desk drawer. Close the door to your office or room and inform anyone nearby that you require privacy to do an important task. Find ways to eliminate distractions, even if it requires a period of daily isolation
- * Produce a focused effort If you make focus on production and raise the stakes, you will become instantaneously more invested in the process and do whatever it takes to focus. Consider the anticipated prize you will bestow upon yourself after completing an important endeavour. It may be something that you've always wanted to buy. It could be a pair of trendy sneakers, a watch, sunglasses, a pair of boots, a vehicle, a house, etc
- * Know what's important Don't give priority to the urgent over the important. The "urgent" is the text message from your significant other reminding you to pick up your dry-cleaned clothing on the way home." The "important" is the due-by-the-end-of-the-day project with the ability to expand your firm and bring long-term rewards. Prioritisation comes into play at this point. Start each day by arranging your responsibilities in order of importance, taking into account factors such as time, deadline and potential impact on your life. A timer is a great tool to develop self-discipline and self-regulation by serving as an external watchdog that guarantees you don't lose focus
- * Practise self-care Don't forget to restore your body's mental and physical resources through exercise, living in the present moment, deep sleep, self-confidence, massage, meditation and active rest. When making daily decisions, having a high level of emotional self-awareness and self-control can help you refuel your own resources and stay focused, even though life is full of distractions.

(Malini Saba is a psychologist)

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