12 Ways to Improve Your Concentration and Explode Your Productivity

Campus Desk

BEING able to concentrate is one of the keys to increasing your productivity. It doesn't matter what you're working on, whether it's a report related to work or a hobby project out in your garage, if you can't focus on the task at hand, it will either not get done or not get done right.

Researchers have been able to show pretty conclusively that an inability to concentrate results in errors and mistakes and generally slow productivity in any environment.

This can take anywhere from a few seconds to a half hour or longer, depending on the complexity of the project and the length of the interruption. This can cause a project to drag out longer than it has to or result in shoddy, inconsistent work.

Sometimes we are working on multiple tasks at a time, such as writing a report in between meetings and phone calls, with the belief that we are being more productive. This is commonly referred to as 'multitasking'. However, it's really a series of planned interruptions or distractions and it has the same negative effect on your work as any other sort of distraction.

However, research has shown that if you can set aside blocks of time to concentrate on a task or project, or learn to avoid distractions, you can usually complete it in less time with more consistency and fewer errors.

To help you increase your productivity through better concentration and focus, here are a few suggestions for building concentration skills and eliminating distractions:

1. Practice Concentrating

An athlete doesn't just engage his sport during competitions. He practices various aspect of his sport when failure and success don't matter. Likewise, practice concentrating when you don't have to so that you'll perform better when you do. The next two suggestions are exercises to help you practice.

2. Candle Watching

As an exercise, light a candle and practice concentrating on the flame. Just notice its colors and movement. Don't analyze anything about the flame, just watch it and notice it. If your mind starts to wander, bring your attention back to the flame. Set a timer and practice for 5 minutes at a time.

3. Observe Breathing and Heart Beat

This exercise is similar to candle watching, but you're going to focus on feeling your breath and heart beat. Since no external device is required, this can be done anywhere.

4. Separate Yourself from Your Environment

When reading or working at the computer, imagine sound-proof walls coming up around you and separating you from your surroundings. This is particularly useful if you have to work in a noisy or busy environment.

5. Set Goals

Having something to shoot for can help you focus on your work. The goal can be something you'll receive by finishing the project, a time limit or a reward you'll give yourself when the task is done.

6. Limit Focus Time

When you have to focus intensely, don't do so for more than 60 to 90 minutes at a time. Just as your body needs a rest from time to time, so does your mind and the harder it's working the more often it needs a break.

7. Avoid Stimulants

Stimulants, like caffeine and sugar, may energize, but they can also make it difficult to concentrate.

8. Allow Time for Mental Wandering

Your mind is kind of like a closet. If you just keep throwing things in, it becomes cluttered and disorganized.

Once in a while you have to pull everything out to see what's there and put it back in orderly fashion so that you have more room and can find things more easily. Allowing your mind to wander from time to time increases its capacity to handle periods of concentration.

9. Write Down To-do List & Distracting Thoughts

Write down things you need to remember and thoughts that are distracting so that you can come back to them later and free your mind to concentrate now.

10. Use a Do-Not-Disturb Sign and Turn Off TV, Radio, Telephone, E-mail, and Internet

Let others know that you don't want to be disturbed and eliminate as many avenues of interruption as possible. Sometimes this may mean working in an unusual location. Occasionally I'll take my notebook computer to the basement to work because nobody disturbs me there.

11. Eliminate Distractions Ahead of Time

If you know something is likely to come up during your focus time, try to deal with it before you get started. This includes getting a snack or drink if you are likely to get hungry or thirsty while working.

12. Notice Distracting Thoughts and Cut Them Off

If you catch your thoughts wandering, bring them back to focus. If you can't do it just mentally, try the next suggestion:

Sources: Internet