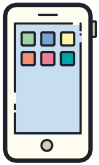# MANAGING DISTRACTION AT WORK

1. What are the most common workplace distractions? Rank them from the most to the least disruptive distractions.
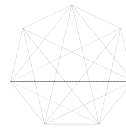
mobile phone / texting

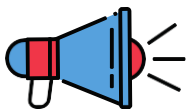the internet

gossip

social media

coworkers dropping by

coffee breaks

email

meetings

noisy co-workers

sitting in a cubicle

My distractions list

1 _____   6 _____
2 _____   7 _____
3 _____   8 _____
4 _____   9 _____
5 _____   10 _____

4 Strategies for Overcoming Distraction by Chris Bailey

The average person is distracted or interrupted every *40 seconds* when working in front of their computer. In other words, we can't work for even *a single minute* before we focus on something else. Sure, sometimes it's easy to get back on track. But other times it can take more than 20 minutes to refocus.

Why? Humans are hardwired for distraction. Our brain's attentional system is programmed to respond to anything that's pleasurable, dangerous, or strange. We even have a **novelty bias**, in which our brain is flooded with a pleasure chemical, dopamine, every time we focus on something new. So how can you take back control? Here are four of my favorite strategies to help you avoid distractions.

1. **Create a distraction-free ritual.** With so many distractions competing for our attention, we need to eliminate as many as we can in advance. A distraction-free mode — an ideal environment in which to focus on your most important, complex tasks — will help. For my distraction-free mode, I install a distractions blocker on my computer (I use an app named Freedom), put on noise-canceling headphones, leave my phone and tablet in another room, grab a coffee, and set my goals. After focusing for 45 minutes, I treat myself to a 10-minute all-you-can-eat distraction buffet.

2. **Set three daily intentions**. When you work with greater determination, you focus on what's really important. To do this, I have a favorite ritual called **the Rule of Three.** First thing in the morning, ask yourself: What three things will I want to finish by day's end? Put your other, less important tasks on a separate to-do list. Part of what makes this rule so powerful is that three things fit easily within our attention at once, and prioritizing them makes these tasks more noticeable than a laundry list of other, less important things.

3. **Work on hard stuff, and do more of it.** Our work tends to expand to fill the time we have available to finish it, and any free time left is usually filled with distractions. In productivity circles, this phenomenon is known as **Parkinson's law**. Sometimes distractions come from internal and external factors, but other times they happen because we're not challenged enough by our work. Assess your busywork level. If it's high, that's usually a sign that you have the capacity to take on more challenging projects, and perhaps even more work in general.

4. **Set an artificial project deadline**. It's up to you to introduce a new and dangerous factor to long-term projects which are not urgent. Have an entire afternoon to write a monotonous report? Give yourself 50 minutes. Making a task into a game forces you to spend more attention and energy on that project because it can't occupy hours of your time any more.