

Emotional Intelligence: Focus (Harvard Business Review)

Three broad forms of focusing on: Yourself; Others; Wider World. (3)

Zeroing in on sensory impressions of ourselves in the moment is one major element of self-awareness. Combining our experiences across time into a coherent view of our authentic selves is an essential part of leadership. To be authentic is to be the same person to others *as you are to yourself*. (7)

Open awareness: Broadly notice what's going on without getting swept away by any particular thing. Simply perceive without judging, censoring, or tuning out.

Cognitive control: Neural circuitry that allows single-minded pursuit of goals (will-power) is also the same mechanism that can manage unruly emotions. (11)

Strengthening open awareness in a leader verges on the unnatural: cultivate a willingness to not be in control, not offer up views, not to judge others. It is less of a deliberate action than of attitude adjustment.

Pessimism narrows focus; positivity widens attention. You need the negative to survive and the positive to thrive. (13)

How we focus holds the key to exercising will-power. The ability to pit self-restraint against self-gratification is a skill that can be developed. (15)

Attention: "to reach toward"

Empathy Triad

Cognitive empathy: Ability to understand another's perspective (think about feelings rather than feel them directly = head-to-heart).

Emotional empathy: Ability to feel what another feels (allows us to feel fast without thinking deeply = heart-to-heart).

Empathic concern: Ability to sense what another needs from you.

Higher-ranking individuals consistently focus their attention less on lower-ranking people and are more likely to interrupt or monopolize. (29) Where we see ourselves on the social ladder sets the default for how much attention we pay.

Leaders with a strong outward focus are not only good listeners but also good questioners. (31)

The link between attention and excellence remains hidden most of the time. Yet attention is the basis of the most essential leadership skills, and never has it been under greater assault. (37)

Distractions

Prime way to deal with distraction is to 1. be okay with it; 2. notice it, and bring your mind back. (57)

Default Mode Network [DMN]: Responsible for analyzing the past, forecasting the future, and reflecting on self and others. People are in this mode at least half the time.

Direct Attention Mode [DAM]: Responsible for putting ruminations aside and stay on task.

Distractions in any form pull us back into default mode, and the cognitive cost is high. It can take 10-18 minutes to get the same level of attention back. (67)

Most of the things we worry about are not immediate existential threats. To reconnect with the logical part of the brain: label the feelings, ask questions openly, and then focus on something more immediate/visceral. (69)

When we are overwhelmed, it feels like choices and power are limited, but we still get to choose who we want to be.

Focus Techniques

Once you are aware about what distracts you, set rules for yourself surrounding those distractions.

Promotion Focus: Motivation by the thought of making gains. Anxiety and doubt undermine this type of motivational focus. (87)

Prevention Focus: Motivation to engage so to avoid loss. Anxiety actually enhances this type of motivational focus.

People routinely overestimate their capacity for self-control. Willpower is limited, however, so use if-then-planning to get jobs done.

Decide in advance what you're going to and when/how/where you are going to do it so there is no deliberating when the time comes, or distractions are presented. In-then plans drastically reduce the demands placed on decision-making in critical moments. Goal attainment and productivity is increased by 200% to 300% on average. (92)

Leverage the connection between mind and body to assess when a change is needed. (100)

The more you oppose something, the more energy is lost. (110)

47% of waking hours are spent in autopilot thinking about something other than what they are actually doing. (133)

Typically, the most stress hormones are released within the first few moments of waking because they are spent thinking about the day ahead, which triggers cortisol from flight-or-flight body responses. Consider ways to reprogram these first few moments to be mindful. (134)

Mindfulness is rooted in focus and awareness. Focus is the ability to concentrate on what you're doing in the moment, while awareness is the ability to recognize and release unnecessary distractions as they arise. (136)

Focus Breaks

Excessive focus exhausts the focus circuits in your brain, which results in losing control, impulsivity, less helpfulness, poor decision making, and less collaboration. (144)

Focus and unfocus are vital. When you unfocus, you engage in the default mode network. (144)

Positive Constructive Daydreaming [PCD]: Mind wandering that engaged by choosing a low-key activity, then imagining something playful, and swiveling attention from the external world to the internal space of your mind with this image in mind while doing the low-key activity. (146) PCD deactivates DMN.

Consider authorized napping, ranging from 10-90 minutes depending on the refresh needed. (148)

Psychological halloweenism: embodying a different identity. This gets you out of your head while also practicing the skill of visualizing from another person's perspective. (149)