CONQUER DIGITAL DISTRACTION WITH TECH-FREE TIME by Larry Rosen

Want to improve your attention, productivity, energy, and happiness? Try three strategies for turning off and charging up from psychologist Larry Rosen.

1 Wean yourself from digital devices.

- Allow yourself to check all digital communications, but then shut everything down and silence your phone.
- Set an alarm for 15 minutes.
- When it rings, give yourself one minute for a tech check-in.
- Repeat this process until you're comfortable increasing your off-grid time to an hour or several hours.

2 Take breaks every 90 minutes.

Our brains work in 90-minute rest-activity cycles, so we need to pause and recharge every hour and a half or so. This is especially true if we're multitasking with technology, which leads to cognitive overload.

The following activities have a calming effect and will give your brain the break it needs:

- Walk in nature for 10 minutes.
- Listen to music.
- Look at art.
- Exercise.
- Meditate.

3 Keep technology out of your bedroom.

The National Sleep Foundation (NSF) and Mayo Clinic agree that the use of blue-light-emitting LED devices is detrimental to sleep—a critical period that cements what you learned during the day, while removing useless information.

So try their recommendations for unplugging to see what works best for you. The goal is to block the release of neurotransmitters that energize your brain and instead promote the production of melatonin, which allows you to rest.

THE NSF'S APPROACH

Abstain from devices starting one hour before bedtime.

MAYO CLINIC'S APPROACH

- Dim screens used at night.
- Keep screens 14 inches from your face.
- Remove screens from the room when you're ready to sleep.

Suffering from technology overload? According to Alexandra Samuel, exploiting digital tools is the antidote. Follow these steps to determine what deserves your attention.

1 Automate your e-mail.

To regain control, focus on the messages that matter most.

SET RULES AND FILTERS to sort and prioritize.

Outlook, Gmail, and most other major e-mail tools offer these features. Use them to ensure that only the most essential messages make it to your primary in-box.

Direct less urgent messages into other folders automatically, and review them later. They might include:

- **Newsletters**
- **Receipts**
- **Internal company notifications**
- **Social media alerts**
- **Messages on which you're only copied**
- **Some meeting requests (if they show up in your calendar and can be reviewed there instead)**

CHECK NONURGENT E-MAIL every so often.

- Designate an hour for reviewing your secondary folders each day or week, depending on the content.
- If you're worried about missing important messages, you can periodically skim through everything you've received. (Select "All Mail" in Gmail, or search your mail for the letter "a" to bring up a comprehensive display.)

2 Automate your news.

Make the most relevant information come to you instead of hunting all over the internet or reading social media posts or articles you shouldn't bother with.

USE A NEWSREADER APP such as feedly (my top recommendation because it works on both computers and mobile devices), Flipboard, or Reeder.

FOLLOW AND SUBSCRIBE to your favorite news sources, blogs, and topic discussions to collect the most relevant items all in one place.

Be as specific as possible about the kinds of articles you want to see.

- *For example:* When setting up a custom article feed, experiment with different combinations of keywords, hashtags, and operators in a search engine (maybe "productivity AND #automation"), and then turn your results into one or more RSS feeds.
- Not every search service offers RSS feeds, and some make them a little hard to find, but once you have URLs for the ones you've created, you can copy them into your newsreader app.

SET ASIDE SPECIFIC TIMES—once a day, or even just a few times a week—to read them.

3 Automate your sharing.

Liking, favoriting, and tweeting help to build your professional credibility and spark new relationships, but maintaining an online presence takes time. You have a couple of options for automating this work.

USE THE ONE-CLICK OPTIONS IN YOUR NEWSREADER APP to post to Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook.

USE A TOOL LIKE HOOTSUITE, BUFFER, OR SOCIAL INBOX that lets you reach multiple networks from one place and schedule posts in advance.

- While reading through stories in your newsreader, put worthwhile items in your queue to go out, adding commentary as needed.
- Once you've set up a system like this, you can create a week's worth of updates in less than an hour.