

10 Ways to Use Laser Sharp Focus to Get More Done

Article by Zen Habits contributor [Jonathan Mead](#).

There's an old Confucius saying that goes "If you chase two rabbits, you catch none." This is especially true when forming new habits and trying to be more productive, but how many times do we do exactly the opposite?

We try to do as much as possible to grow, learn and better ourselves. We read books, blogs, and soak up all sorts of information on creating new habits. The fact is, a lot of this effort is in vain. Our attention is pulled in so many directions, that our energy is spread too thin.

It doesn't help much that our lives have become increasingly complex. We have more ways to communicate than ever before: face-to-face, phone, email, instant messaging, twitter, blogging, etc. We have more tools to get work done, but our energy is diminished after being pulled in a million directions.

If we know that we need to focus, [why don't we use what we already know?](#) If we supposedly know how to change, why don't we change? If we know what's wrong, why don't we fix it?

I think the answer to this question is a little more complex than what can be looked at in a simple blog post. But in short, I think the answer is a matter of energy. [It's not a lack of confidence, but the lack of ability to make a serious commitment.](#) Commitment isn't just thinking about really wanting something. It's not just reading something on a few different blogs and thinking "oh yeah, I've read that a few times, I know." Reading or seeing something isn't enough. You have to put your energy behind it enough to be able to move from point a to point z. If you're trying to hit points c, s, q, y and t (which might represent other goals you have) you'll get distracted. You lose focus and your energy fizzles.

If changing your habits and your life means only focusing on one thing at a time, how do you defend yourself from productivity ADD? Here are 10 tools to help you:

1. **Deep focus instead of multi-tasking.** We often kid ourselves thinking that we're getting more done by multi-tasking, but we often end up just spending a lot of time spinning our wheels. Try to focus on one thing deeply, instead of spreading your attention across multiple tasks.
2. **Wraps up tasks that are easily completed.** Most of the time I'm having trouble staying focused is because there a bunch of little things on my mind that I know I need to do. Write down everything that can be completed in less than 10 minutes and finish everything on the list before you start on a project that requires more focus. This doesn't mean that every time something comes up that would take less than ten minutes to do, you do it. You simply batch everything together that requires ten minutes of time or less.

3. **Stay in the now.** As much as you can, practice focusing your attention on the present moment. Constantly move your attention back to now. If you have trouble with this, you might want to [get this watch](#).
4. **Respond, don't react.** Our tendency to react to what seems "urgent" hurts us in the long run. I would rather write an amazing book in a year, sacrificing things like replying to email and having a super clean house. Block out time in your day for the things that are really important.
5. **Feng shui your workspace.** What's the most important thing to you? What are you really passionate about? For me, this is writing and music. I feng shui my work area to speak those things. I have writing books on my shelves, I have musical instruments around me. I have a cork board that has my writing goals and inspirational quotes about writing that speak to me. Having these "attention reinforcements" helps you to stay focused on what is most important to you.
6. **Give yourself a meaningful purpose.** You'll have a hard time staying focused if you feel the work you're doing isn't meaningful. If you're having trouble staying focused at a job you're not passionate about, it's likely because you have no interest in the work you're doing. There's no motivation for you other than a paycheck. Find a career that has meaning and gives you a sense of purpose and your motivation and focus will naturally increase.
7. **Distinguish between urgent and important.** We often spend most of our time doing things that seem important, but really aren't. They are just urgent. This doesn't really make sense, because it would seem things that are important, should be urgent, right? If you want to do meaningful things, if you want to accomplish things that will have a long-term impact, focus on the important.
8. **Visual how you want your day to evolve.** If you don't really know exactly how you want your day to go, how can you expect it to go the way you want it to? In order to combat random events and unknowns keeping you from doing what's important, take time to visualize how you want your day to go. Pay attention when you visualize certain things to how they make you feel. Use positive visualization to control how you will react when certain events come up that detract you from keeping focused.
9. **Practice single pointed focus.** It's hard to imagine staying focused when there are so many possibilities of things you could be doing. Sometimes priorities aren't enough to keep you motivated, it's just a matter of flexing your focusing muscles. Here's a good meditation to get you started on flexing your single minded muscles: Close your eyes and imagine that you are sitting alone in a chair in a room (it doesn't really matter where). Now imagine there's an apple on the table in front of you. Try taking bites of that apple in your mind, and focusing on the taste and sensations of the apple. Look at how the different bites are taken out one at a time. Practicing this and other types of meditations will greatly enhance your ability to focus on one thing for long durations of time.
10. **Practice mindfulness.** This seems so simple, but it's often the most difficult thing to do. How often when you're eating, are you thinking about all sorts of different things, other than your food? How often when you you're spending time with a friend, is your mind wandering

on other things? You can't expect to be focused if you're not paying attention to what is going on around you. The next time you wash your hands, focus on the feeling of the water and the sensation of the towel when drying your hands. When you're eating, focus on the taste and texture of the food in your mouth. You can't expect to be focused in your work, if you constantly lack focus in every other area of your life. Practice focus in the normal everyday things you do, and it will start spilling over in to your work.

This article was written by Zen Habits contributor Jonathan Mead of the [Illuminated Mind](#) blog. For more ways to defend yourself from productive ADD, grab a [subscription to *Illuminated Mind*](#).