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We allow ourselves to live in a world of distraction. We skitter along the surface of things. We've lost the capacity to focus, the capacity to do deep work.

We've become addicted to the stimulation and outside input, checking and re-checking our smartphones and our tablets and our e-mails; responding incessantly to the phone calls and messages and notifications and alerts. Overwhelmed and inundated by the expectations and the deadlines and the demands, endeavoring to pay attention to everything and succeeding only at a continuous partial attention.

We've become addicted, as Jim Collins, author of that wonderful business book, *Good to Great*, says "...we've become addicted to the undisciplined pursuit of more."

Recent studies suggest that many professionals check their e-mails 36 times an hour. Interruption science tells us that every interruption in our day has a "cost" in terms of lost focus and productivity. Researchers have measured the cost—it's between 11 minutes and 25 minutes.

So work with me here. We'll go with the lower number and assume a 10-hour day: 36 checks of the smartphone every hour x 10 hours each day x 11 lost minutes of productivity = **A lost 3,960 minutes** of productivity every day. (Yes, you're

Why You Will Become Obsolete

By Walt Hampton

scratching your head wondering how you could lose 66 hours a day.)

Another study from the world of interruption science: We're interrupted or cause ourselves to be interrupted, usually with our smartphones, every three minutes of the day. Let's use conservative numbers again and go again with a 10-hour day. So, an interruption every three minutes would be 20 interruptions an hour x 10 hours x 11 minutes = **A lost 2,200 minutes** of productivity each day.

Whew. That's a much better outcome. Only 36 lost hours.

But put aside focus and productivity for a moment. There are other costs. Constant distraction:

- Prevents us from doing deep, uninterrupted work
- Causes stress and overwhelm
- Damages our creativity
- Isolates us and dishonors our important relationships
- Separates us from the natural world

Without the capacity to do deep work, we are replaceable.

Amazon has launched a cashier-free store. Uber has driverless cars. Black Rock is using robots to pick stocks. Watson provides complicated medical diagnoses at lightning speed.

Many professionals—my colleagues at the bar included—have a vague dis-ease around the rise of artificial intelligence. They should. Because the superficial tasks we do—that is, most of the stuff we tick off our to-do lists—can be done better, cheaper, and faster by AI.

The gift of our humanity, though, is our ability to ponder, reflect, refine. Our abil-

ity to create. Our ability to do deep work. Our ability to *focus*.

Focus is a muscle that can be (re)trained. Here are some practices that will help:

1. Work in block time. Science shows that you work most effectively in uninterrupted 60 to 90 minute blocks of time in which you do just one thing. The operative words: uninterrupted; one thing.

2. Turn off your chimes and alerts. You control these. And unless you're working on a space launch or you're on call to deliver the next royal princess, it's not likely that every single message or piece of information in real time is absolutely necessary.

3. Schedule your social media time. Social media is critically important to the success of most enterprises. But it's an easy place to hide out when you're feeling bored or stressed or aimless. (Or suffering a FarmVille detox.) So schedule the block of time when you'll "do" your social media; then do it, and move on.

4. Turn off your smartphone. Barack and Vladimir have "people" who field their calls. But your world will not lapse into darkness if you miss a few. And the respite you enjoy will yield a 100 fold.

5. Go tech free. For an evening or a day or a week. Get off the grid entirely. Soak in the silence. Read, write, reflect, create. Be—really be—with yourself... and with those you love.

Distraction kills focus.

Focus will be the currency of the new economy. Those who can focus will thrive. Those who can't will become obsolete.

