



Overwhelm, difficulty focusing, missed deadlines, and chronic stress are a few of the most common symptoms of poor attention management. The quality, intensity, and depth of our attention are more important to the results we get than how long we spend on any given task. Attention Management is a practice that allows people to decrease stress while increasing productivity.

THE THREE PRACTICES

Increase awareness of which zone you are in. Identify where you are placing your attention and expending your time in the Reactive Zone, the Proactive Zone, the Distraction Zone, or the Waste Zone.

Avoid distractions and minimize waste by asserting boundaries and raising standards. You can do this in many different ways. Several of the most popular techniques are listed below:

- *Concentrate on doing one thing at a time:* Giving partial attention to several activities all in the same moment (multitasking) does not increase productivity; it reduces it (by as much as 25-50 percent according to recent studies). While some multitasking may be unavoidable, we can significantly boost our productivity by concentrating on one task at a time and completing it before starting the next.
 - *Engage in a Weekly Focusing Process:* Nothing is more crucial to your success than focusing on what is most important each week. Yet if you don't make the time to plan your week and schedule the proactive items, you'll find yourself getting sucked into the Reactive Zone. Before that happens, at the beginning of each week, take 15–20 minutes to review your priorities, goals, projects, and relationships, and schedule those activities that are important but not necessarily urgent.
 - *Create a Time Budget:* How can you spend your time wisely if you don't know how or where it's going? Track the top seven categories of time usage for a couple of weeks to learn exactly where it goes. This can help you decide how you want to modify your allocation of time and attention going forward.
 - *Use weekly time blocks:* Create "time blocks" of related activities in your weekly schedule. Similar activities on certain days of the week can be scheduled together to avoid having to mentally "switch gears" every few minutes. It becomes habitual (and easier, more enjoyable, and productive) to do the same kind of activity on certain days at certain times.
 - *Schedule and keep appointments with yourself:* Book appointments with yourself to work on specific projects, activities, or tasks. Treat these appointments with the same respect as you would if the appointment was with your most valuable customer. Tell co-workers, "I can't talk now. I have an appointment" (even if it is an appointment with yourself).
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Invest time in the Proactive Zone to cause the Reactive Zone to shrink along with your problems, pressures, and stress. But where do you find the time? Since the activities in the Reactive Zone are *important*, you can't just refuse to do them. However, you can recover a lot of bandwidth from the Distraction and Waste Zones because neither of those involve *important* activities. By practicing avoiding distractions and minimizing waste using techniques such as those listed in number 2 in the diagram, you can easily recover 3–5 hours a week to invest into being more proactive.