

# Free to Focus: A Total Productivity System to Achieve More by Doing Less

On the StrengthsFinder, my number one strength is MAXIMIZER. As a maximizer, I am compelled to leverage the 168 hours that I am given each week. To that end, one of my greatest allies is bestselling author Michael Hyatt. In his most recent book, *Free to Focus: A Total Productivity System to Achieve More by Doing Less*, Hyatt delivers on his promise. He provides an intuitive and user-friendly system to focus more and more of your time on the things that you are most gifted and passionate about.

Take a look at these Book Notes to get a snapshot of the insights and the A-HA moments that awaits you.

Title: ***Free to Focus: A Total Productivity System to Achieve More by Doing Less***

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## **Book Description:**

Everyone gets 168 hours a week, but it never feels like enough, does it? Work gobbles up the lion's share—many professionals are working as much as 70 hours a week—leaving less and less for rest, exercise, family, and friends. You know, all those things that make life great.

Most people think productivity is about finding or saving time. But it's not. It's about making our time work for us. Just imagine having free time again. It's not a pipe dream.

In *Free to Focus*, *New York Times* bestselling author Michael Hyatt reveals to readers nine proven ways to win at work so they are finally free to succeed at the rest of life—their health, relationships, hobbies, and more. He helps readers redefine their goals, evaluate what's working, cut out the nonessentials, focus on the most important tasks, manage their time and energy, and build momentum for a lifetime of success.

## Book Quotes:

My problem back then was doing too much—mostly by myself. Later I realized focusing on everything means focusing on nothing. It's almost impossible to accomplish anything significant when you're racing through an endless litany of tasks and emergencies. And yet this is how many of us spend our days, weeks, months, years—sometimes, our entire lives. LOCATION: 227

Information is no longer scarce. But attention is. In fact, in a world where information is freely available, focus becomes one of the most valuable commodities in the workplace. But for most of us, work is the hardest place to find it. The truth is we live and labor in the Distraction Economy. LOCATION: 235

We've all experienced it. Our devices, apps, and tools make us think we're saving time, being hyperproductive. In reality most of us just jam our day with the buzz and grind of low-value activity. We don't invest our time in big and important projects. Instead, we're tyrannized by tiny tasks. LOCATION: 251

We're doing more and gaining less, which leaves us with a huge gap between what we want to achieve and what we actually accomplish. LOCATION: 256

The breakthrough came when I realized most productivity "solutions" actually make things worse. LOCATION: 315

The most productive business leaders I coach recognize productivity is not about getting more things done; it's about getting the right things done. It's about starting each day with clarity and ending with a sense of satisfaction, accomplishment, and energy to spare. It's about achieving more by doing less... LOCATION: 323

Free to Focus is a total productivity system that follows three simple steps, composed of three actions each.

Step 1: Stop.

Step 2: Cut

Step 3: Act LOCATION: 328-346

True productivity starts with being clear on what we truly want. LOCATION: 397

For now it's enough to say, the important question is not, Can I do this job faster, easier, and cheaper? It's, Should I be doing this job at all? Getting clear on that question is more important now than ever, as technology gives us unprecedented access to information, other people, and, of course, our work. LOCATION: 428

That brings us to the real objective, and Free to Focus's underlying foundation: productivity should free you to pursue what's most important to you. The goal, the true objective of productivity, should be freedom. LOCATION: 490

I define freedom four ways.

1. Freedom to Focus.
2. Freedom to Be Present.
3. Freedom to Be Spontaneous.
4. Freedom to Do Nothing. LOCATION: 492-527

Our brains aren't designed to run nonstop. When we drop things into neutral, ideas flow on their own, memories sort themselves out, and we give ourselves a chance to rest. If you think about it, most of your breakthrough ideas in your business or personal life come when you're relaxed enough to let your mind wander. Creativity depends on times of disengagement, which means doing nothing from time to time is a competitive advantage. LOCATION: 532

Productivity should ultimately give you back more time, not require more of you. LOCATION: 574

That's what productivity gives you: the freedom to choose what you want to focus your time and energy on. LOCATION: 586

Four Zones of Productivity

- **Zone 4: The Drudgery Zone.** The Drudgery Zone is made up of tasks for which you have no passion and no proficiency. Basically, these are the things you hate doing and aren't any good at anyway. This is the worst kind of work for you to do. It's a grind.
- **Zone 3: The Disinterest Zone.** The Disinterest Zone is made up of things that you're proficient at, but you aren't that passionate about. Sure, you can do these tasks—maybe better than anyone else in your office—but they drain your energy.

Why? It's because you have no passion.

- **Zone 2: The Distraction Zone.** In this zone, life starts to get a lot more tolerable. The Distraction Zone is made up of things that you are passionate about but sadly have little proficiency for.
- **Zone 1: The Desire Zone.** The Desire Zone is the point where your passion and proficiency intersect, where you can unleash your unique gifts and abilities to make your most significant contribution to your business, family, community...and maybe the world. If your destination is freedom, this is where you'll experience it.

**LOCATION:650- 696**

Working in your Desire Zone has a profound effect on personal productivity—and more. It's the best way I know to win at work and succeed at life in general, because you'll do more high-leverage work in less time, which frees up margin for the other domains in life: family, friends, and so on. **LOCATION: 701**

True productivity is about doing more of what is in your Desire Zone and less of everything else. Underline that statement. Write it on a Post-it Note and stick it to your computer monitor. Post it in your car. Recite it ten times a day if you need to, but do not miss this point: true productivity is about doing more of what is in your Desire Zone and less of everything else. Focusing your time and energy on your Desire Zone is going to drive results and create freedom. This is the key to achieving more by doing less. **LOCATION: 756**

The more time you spend in your Desire Zone, the more good you do not only for yourself but also the world around you. **LOCATION: 762**

The biggest obstacle in our efforts to become productive may very well be our mindset. We don't intend for this to happen, but our lives become driven by a collection of beliefs we have about ourselves and our situation. These are limiting beliefs, because they limit our potential and establish false, constricting boundaries that prevent us from accomplishing bigger and better things. We could fill a whole book with limiting beliefs, but let's zero in on the seven that most impact our efforts to become more productive.

1. "I just don't have enough time."

If you're struggling with this limiting belief, replace it with this liberating truth: I have all the time I need to accomplish what matters most.

2. "I'm just not that disciplined."

If that describes you, replace it with this liberating truth: Working in my Desire Zone doesn't require much discipline.

3. "I'm not really in control of my time."

If you fall victim to this limiting belief, replace it with this liberating truth: I have the ability to make better use of the time I do control.

4. "Highly productive people are just born that way."

If you fall victim to this limiting belief, replace it with this liberating truth: Productivity is a skill I can develop.

5. "I tried before, and it didn't work."

If you've been discouraged by the things that have failed so far, replace that limiting belief with this liberating truth: I can get better results by trying a different approach.

6. "My circumstances won't allow it right now, but they're only temporary."

We cannot keep postponing our progress. Instead, we need to embrace this liberating truth: I don't have to wait until my circumstances change to get started and make progress.

7. "I'm not good with technology."

If you find yourself scratching your head at the multitude of different, complicated productivity apps, tools, and systems out there, embrace this liberating truth: True productivity doesn't require complex technology or systems. It's more about aligning my daily activities with my priorities, and I can do that. Anyone can do that, in fact, but it begins with believing you can. LOCATION: 782-832

Jack Nevison, founder of New Leaf Project Management, crunched the numbers from several different studies on long work hours. He found there's a ceiling. Push past fifty hours of work in a week and there's no productivity gain for the extra time. In fact, it goes backwards. One of the studies he examined found that fifty hours on the job only produced about thirty-seven hours of useful work. At fifty-five hours, it dropped to almost

thirty. The more you work beyond a fifty-hour threshold, according to this study, the less productive you become. Nevison calls this the Rule of Fifty. LOCATION: 889

Time is fixed, but energy can flex. Every day contains the same number of hours, while your energy swings up and down depending on multiple variables, including rest, nutrition, and emotional health. LOCATION: 914

Personal energy is a renewable resource, replenished by seven basic practices. We must: Sleep. Eat. Move. Connect. Play. Reflect. Unplug. LOCATION: 918

Practice 1: Sleep. Nightly rejuvenation is the foundation of productivity. Sufficient sleep keeps us mentally sharp and improves our ability to remember, learn, and grow. It refreshes our emotional state, reduces stress, and recharges our bodies. LOCATION: 948

Practice 2: Eat. The food we eat makes an immediate, long-lasting, and powerful impact on our energy levels. There's a reason athletes are so vigilant about their intake. The best productivity system in the world can't help you if you are starving your body of the nutrients it needs to run at peak efficiency. LOCATION: 983

Practice 3: Move. Too often we tell ourselves we don't have enough energy to exercise, but exercise itself is an energizer. It gives more than it takes. In fact, few things have as direct an impact on our energy levels as a decent workout. If you get moving early, it will pay huge dividends all day long. LOCATION: 1013

Practice 4: Connect. We can't talk about managing energy without talking about the effect other people have on our energy level. The people around us have the power to dramatically boost or drain our energy faster than almost anything else. LOCATION: 1060

Practice 5: Play. LOCATION: 1092

Practice 6: Reflect. Another source of rejuvenation is reflection. This could take many forms, but most often it's something like reading, journaling, introspection, meditation, prayer, or worship. LOCATION: 1152

Give yourself space to think through your day, including your daily decisions, wins, losses, ideas, insights, and everything else that made the day unique. This exercise ensures that you're connected to a bigger why and that you don't get lost in the minutiae of life. Staying firmly connected to your why will give you the energy and strength you need to complete your work and finish the race—every day. LOCATION: 1163

Practice 7: Unplug. First, don't think about work. Put it out of your mind. Preoccupation with work while you're spending time with family and friends makes you physically present but mentally absent. LOCATION: 1174

Courage is the willingness to act despite your fear for the sake of an important value or principle. Your why is an important value or principle! That means it is worth protecting, and if you don't protect it, no one will. LOCATION: 1237

As new requests and opportunities pop up and as you review your existing tasks and commitments, here is the rule of thumb you need to cling to for dear life: everything that is outside your Desire Zone is a possible candidate for elimination. I'm not saying all of them should be or will be eliminated, but they're all candidates. If something is outside your Desire Zone, you should at least stop and ask the question, Could I eliminate this? LOCATION: 1284

One of the fastest ways to get focused on work that drives results is eliminating low-leverage tasks and commitments that fill your lists and clutter your calendar. Cut everything you can from your Drudgery, Disinterest, and Distraction Zones. LOCATION: 1298

In fact, it's possible to say no in a positive way that leaves both you and the other person better off than either of you were before. LOCATION: 1337

No matter how great your productivity system is, nothing can prevent people from making new requests of you. In fact, as you become more productive and efficient, you may develop a reputation for being the go-to person for even more work than ever before. That's why you must develop a bulletproof strategy for gracefully saying no to new requests that are outside your Desire Zone and ultimately aren't worth doing. To help, here are five tips for a tactful no.

1. Acknowledge your resources are finite. Determine who needs access to you and who doesn't.
2. Let your calendar say no for you.
3. Adopt a strategy for responding to requests.
4. Accept the fact that you will be misunderstood. LOCATION: 1342-1430

We can never give everyone our full attention, and sometimes we can't give them any. If you want to maximize your productivity, you must identify exactly what does and does not require your attention and, if something does deserve it, you must figure out how much of your attention it deserves. Here's a hint: if it's something that is not in your Desire Zone or one of your high-priority tasks, it doesn't deserve much of your brain power. LOCATION: 1509

Desire Zone. Once you've eliminated, automated, and delegated everything you possibly can from your Drudgery, Disinterest, and Distraction Zones, you'll find your world opens up. It won't happen overnight, but this is the goal—spending most of your time focused on Desire Zone activities. LOCATION: 1863

Delegation is a process, and it requires an investment of your time. Your goal is to develop passionate, proficient team members whom you can trust with the most delicate tasks, and this will happen only when you walk them through a trust- and skill-building process. LOCATION: 1882

Levels of Delegation:

- **Delegation Level 1.** In Level 1 delegation, you want the person to do exactly what you've asked them to do—no more, no less.
- **Delegation Level 2.** In Level 2 delegation, you want the person to examine or research a topic and report back to you.
- **Delegation Level 3.** Starting with Level 3, you're giving the person more room to operate and participate in the problem-solving process, but you are still reserving the final decision for yourself.
- **Delegation Level 4.** At Level 4, you want the person to evaluate the options, make a decision on their own, execute the decision, and then give you an update after the fact.
- **Delegation Level 5.** At Level 5, you are effectively handing the entire project or task over to someone else and exiting the decision altogether. LOCATION: 1941-2000

When fielding competing demands on our attention, we sometimes default to addressing two or more at the same time. Then we pride ourselves about our ability to multitask. The problem is, the human brain doesn't really multitask. LOCATION: 2057

By breaking our focus, switching also slows our processing ability. When we focus on one task, we filter what's important for the completion of that task. However, when we multitask, we compromise our ability to decide what's relevant and what's not. LOCATION: 2068

[Cal] Newport argues that we need extended periods of uninterrupted time to do our best thinking. That's what he calls deep work. LOCATION: 2100

I find it's helpful to divide time across three broad categories of activity: Front Stage, Back Stage, and Off Stage.

- **Front Stage.** When you think of a stage, you probably imagine the front stage first. This is where the action happens and the drama unfolds—at least from the audience’s perspective. An actor’s job is acting, and he performs that role on the stage for all to see. The tasks for which you’re hired and paid constitute Front Stage activities.
- **Back Stage.** We primarily see an actor on the front stage, but that’s not where he does all his work. Back stage work enables him to step out on stage and shine. The audience sees only the performance; they don’t see the initial audition, hours of rehearsals, time devoted to memorizing lines, or rituals an actor performs to produce a good show. For most of us, Back Stage includes step-two activities (specifically, elimination, automation, and delegation) plus coordination, preparation, maintenance, and development.
- **Off Stage.** This one’s easy. Off Stage refers to time when you’re not working, when you’re away from the stage and focused on family, friends, relaxation, and rejuvenation. Off Stage is crucial to restoring your energy so you have something to offer when you come back to the stage (chap. LOCATION: 2118-2174)

The premise behind the Ideal Week is that you have a choice in life. You can either live on purpose, according to a plan you’ve set. Or you can live by accident, responding to the demands of others. The first approach is proactive; the second reactive. LOCATION: 2224

Spreading your focus over a million different inputs undermines your productivity, creativity, momentum, and satisfaction. Consolidation—and the focus it provides—offers a better way. By practicing MegaBatching and intentionally structuring your week, you can create the time and space to accomplish goals that otherwise might have seemed out of reach. LOCATION: 2320

The good news is that you can design your week to keep visibility on your major tasks and review your progress as you go. The trick is to break down your major goals and initiatives into manageable next steps. Then you can map those next steps onto your week by identifying three outcomes you need to hit to make the progress you want.

- **Step 1: List Your Biggest Wins.**
- **Step 2: Review the Prior Week.**
- **Step 3: Review Your Lists and Notes.**
- **Step 4: Check Goals, Projects, Events, Meetings, and Deadlines.**
- **Step 5: Designate Your Weekly Big 3.**
- **Step 6: Plan Your Rejuvenation.** LOCATION: 2373-2482

Interruptions represent an external input that breaks your concentration—a drop-in visit, a phone call, an email

or Slack message that pulls you away from the work you're supposed to be doing. LOCATION: 2648

A study by Hewlett Packard and the University of London found when we divert our attention to incoming calls and messages, it dings our IQ by 10 percent; that's twice the effect of smoking marijuana. While it won't permanently impair your cognitive functioning, "it will make you stupid temporarily," say neuropsychologist Friederike Fabritius and leadership expert Hans Hagemann. LOCATION: 2669

While an interruption is an external force demanding our attention, a distraction is anything internal that disables or destroys concentration. LOCATION: 2720

But every time we bounce off task, we train our brains to become even more distracted and shorten our own attention spans, making it harder to cultivate a life of focus. LOCATION: 2723

If you want to become free to focus, you can't spend your whole day working on someone else's priorities. That's never going to drive the results you want for yourself. Nor can you let the ease of downhill tasks pull you away from the high-leverage work essential for reaching your goals. LOCATION: 2845

When faced with roadblocks to your productivity, just go back to the three primary steps of the system: Stop, Cut, and Act. These steps provide a rapid course correction so you can stay on track even in your busiest seasons. LOCATION: 2914

Stop. No one makes smart decisions in a frenzy of activity. Instead, press pause. Step away from your desk. Take a walk outside. Get a good night's sleep—whatever it takes to clear your head. Then evaluate. LOCATION: 2918

Cut. Odds are you don't just feel as if you have too much to do. You actually have too much to do. LOCATION: 2921

Act. Now that you have a clear path, it's time to get moving. Starting is half the battle, so identify next steps that will give you a quick sense of momentum. LOCATION: 2924