

# 10 MOST COMMON DISTRACTIONS THAT KILL PRODUCTIVITY



# Introduction

Where does the time go? People talk about minutes passing like hours so why isn't that the case when you're working? Why is that analogy turned upside down where the hours fly by like minutes? Could it be that unseen aliens are fiddling with the cosmic clock somehow? With everyone you know complaining that there's not enough time in the day, perhaps it's not such an outlandish possibility!

One of the most frustrating things for busy people is that there's just not enough time in the day to get everything done. You wake up early full of vim and vigor, looking forward to a busy and productive day. You put in the hours, work diligently, and try to get through your carefully planned schedule as efficiently as you can.

But before you know it, the day's over. You're mentally and physically exhausted and yet, you've only got half of the things on your to-do list done. What are you doing wrong? Do you need to manage your time better? Are you scheduling your day unrealistically? Should you multitask or delegate more? More importantly, why do you feel that your work (that you do manage to get done) just isn't up to par?

The short answer is that you're not doing anything wrong - at least not intentionally. The problem often lies in one word: distractions. And that word needs to be eliminated from your vocabulary!

Distractions are probably the number one cause of your lack of time - and lack of productivity. A few minutes here, a few minutes there, and suddenly you have distractions building up and eating a huge chunk out of your day and totally derailing your mental clarity.

Distractions don't only waste time but they have an immense impact on your ability to stay focused and get tasks done efficiently and on time. The reason many people don't understand this is because distractions happen a few minutes at a time, which seems quite harmless. You'd be amazed at how many hours those minutes add up to. Whichever way you look at it, distractions are bad.

### ***Why keep reading?***

This book will help you identify and explore 10 common distractions that are massive productivity killers. You'll probably recognize several of them right away (and plead guilty!) Some of the others may come as a surprise because you never realized they were distractions.

After each distraction, you'll get a quick fix to help you overcome it. Once your most common distractions become a thing of the past, you'll notice a surge in your overall productivity, as well as in your ability to focus and function with amazing mental clarity. Yes, it's that simple! So, let's jump right in!

# 10 Productivity-Killing Distractions

These 10 distractions aren't in order of worst to least productivity killers. This is because, for one person, a given distraction can be worse than another.

Additionally, these distractions may change from day to day, with a certain one being worse on a particular day. The bottom line is that you'll recognize several – or even all of them – as the culprits for your low productivity and lack of time.

These are the most common distractions that cause seriously low productivity and very poor work outcomes.

## 1. Social media

I know I said that these distractions are in no particular order – with this one exception. Social media distraction just has to top the list! It's possibly the biggest simply because of the sheer number of people affected by it - and by the amount of time it wastes.

What is it about social media that's so addictive? It's the number one digital addiction in the world, followed by gaming. Naturally, there are lots of theories about why people get hooked on social media but that's another discussion altogether.

Here's a typical scenario: you're busy doing something when you get a Facebook notification. Your best friend has just posted a photo. You really know you shouldn't but she always posts such amazing photos and you're dying to see it.

The struggle is very short-lived. You decide to take a quick peek and maybe give her a like... just a quick peek! After all, you've been working hard and need a break anyway.

You open your Facebook and before you know it, you're scrolling through other posts and posting comments... you're totally lost to the world. Then you decide to check out Instagram while you're at it... before you know it, you've wasted a good 15-20 minutes.

The amazing thing is that this scenario is being repeated at formal workplaces all over the world. Bosses and supervisors are going nuts, complaining of how employee productivity has gone down. But short of banning cell phones from the workplace, there's nothing they can do.

Social media isn't just a huge time-waster, but it's also a major brain fogger. While you're having fun scrolling through your Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, your brain is in overdrive processing all the colors and information. Digital media in general exhausts the brain and saps it of energy.

This is why you may be experiencing energy crashes and mental exhaustion very early on in the day. Even a few minutes can drain your clarity and mental sharpness.

So, in addition to running late on that deadline, you must now deal with a major case of brain fog.

**Quick fix:** Some people suggest unsubscribing from email and phone notifications but who are we kidding? That's not going to stop you from going online anyway.

So, what's the real solution? Get a social media blocking app, pronto!

Let's face it. If you're a social media nerd, there's no way you're going to abstain willingly, even when you start to realize that it's killing your productivity. That's what an addiction is.

The alternative is to force yourself to stay off - by making your social media inaccessible. A social media app blocks you from using social media on your phone or computer for a timeframe of your choosing. It's a brilliant idea.

Just block yourself during your working hours, or at least for a while when you need to focus on something super important. If your fingers start itching to check out the latest, you won't be able to access your Facebook, Instagram, or whatever platform you chose to block.

There are dozens of these apps with various features and options to choose from. The most popular are Offline, Social Fever, and Stay Focused. Problem solved. Get yourself to the App Store right now!

## 2. Cell phones

Keeping your phone turned on and answering every call can literally distract you every 5 minutes. If you're one of those people who just needs to take every call, you don't need to look any further for why your work isn't up to par.

Even if the call lasts a minute or two, each time you get back to work, you've lost your focus and your train of thought. Just as you start getting your mind into focus, the phone rings again. It's your mum calling to say hi, your partner asking you to bring home takeout, or a friend calling to chat.

Even legitimate calls from clients can be a major pain. If you let clients know that you're always available, you may be inundated with calls about trivial issues that can be extremely stressful. Add to that an incessant stream of email alerts and random notifications, and you've got a real problem.

**Quick fix:** There are two quick fixes here. The first is to set firm boundaries. Let your friends and family know that they should never disturb you when you're working unless it's a real emergency. Let clients know that you're available to take calls at designated hours. Otherwise, they can leave a voice message and you'll get back to them as soon as possible.

The second fix is to simply turn off your phone or put it on silent and check your calls every couple of hours. Return calls that are directly

related to your work such as client queries or calls from coworkers in a branch office, etc.

But here's the catch. Studies show that silent or turned-off phones can be as much of a distraction as beeping ones! It can be more distracting to keep glancing at the silent phone on your desk, wondering who called.

If this sounds like you then the only thing to do is just keep that phone out of reach. Put it away in a drawer or in another room (if you work from home) or with a trusted coworker. That way, you eliminate a lot of the temptation while being able to focus better.

### **3. Worry and anxiety**

Worry and anxiety keep us tossing and turning at night, so it's no wonder that they'll keep your mind in turmoil when you're trying to focus on a task.

When a student's academic achievement starts to decline or when an employee begins missing deadlines and showing poor work performance, the cause is almost always worry or anxiety.

When you're worried or anxious, your mind just keeps wandering back to the issue bothering you, interrupting your train of thought. Worry and anxiety also keeps your stress levels high and force your body and brain to divert more energy into reducing stress hormones and stabilizing your body functions.

When your stress levels rise, you'll suffer from physical fatigue as well as mental exhaustion, brain fog, and heightened negative emotions. This is especially debilitating when you're performing a task that requires strong mental focus such as data analysis, compiling a report, etc.

Some worries and fears are very valid and understandable. An ill family member, financial problems, or a marital issue are problems. However, letting them fill your mind as you're trying to work is not going to solve them. Nor is it going to improve your productivity.

**Quick fix:** Forcing yourself to focus on the task at hand is the best option for several reasons. First, finishing a task efficiently or producing an outstanding piece of work can lift your spirits and improve your mood. The sense of achievement will fill you with positivity, hope, and optimism. Secondly, forcing yourself to focus will also give your mind a respite from your worries and fears.

Learning to do this takes some practice but it can be done - and it works. When your mind starts drifting to the cause of your worry, mentally block the thought. Tell yourself that you need to focus right now and will think about the issue later. Dismiss the thought and continue what you were doing. Repeat the process each time your mind begins to wander.

Over time, you'll train your brain not to distract you with worrying or anxious thoughts while you're working. All it takes is a little bit of willpower and a lot of practice.

Another suggestion is to play soft uplifting music as you work to keep yourself calm and focused. You can also diffuse some mood-boosting

essential oils like rose, peppermint, lavender, or vetiver. These essential oils are famous for their calming and uplifting properties. Peppermint essential oil also gives the brain a great energy boost.

## 4. Hunger

This may come as a surprise because most people wouldn't categorize hunger as a distraction. But hunger pangs can be a huge distraction that saps attention and focus. It can also cause memory lapses and minimize your ability to retain information. Imagine the impact it can have on your productivity when you're trying to study, do an analysis, or focus on writing an article.

Hunger pangs are often related to intense mental effort and concentration because your brain literally burns energy when it's thinking hard! In other words, hunger is a sign that your brain needs to be fed. The same goes for physical activity. If your job requires a lot of physical exertion and movement, you'll get hungry faster because your body is burning up calories faster.

**Quick Fix:** Don't let yourself get too hungry. It's common to ignore hunger pangs until they become uncomfortable. But keeping hunger at bay will prevent mental burnout, unhealthy cravings, and binging.

Simply monitor your stomach and the moment you notice that first little growl, eat!

Always keep a few snacks on hand and reach for them when you start feeling peckish. For an added and lasting energy boost, avoid sugar. Instead, eat foods that are nutritious, filling, and take longer to be digested such as oatmeal, cereal, rice cakes, whole wheat crackers, and yogurt.

Take advantage of your hunger to boost your brainpower by eating superfoods. These are foods packed with powerful brain nutrients that will keep your brain super-sharp throughout the day. Brain superfoods include nuts, whole grains, berries, and dark chocolate. Don't skip meals, especially breakfast. Have a good lunch and try to stick to regular mealtimes no matter how busy you are. It's better to stop and eat rather than totally derail your brain and struggle to get back on track for the rest of the day.



## **5. Inability to say no**

If you work at an office, don't earn yourself a reputation for being the go-to person or the go-for person. Being a go-to person means your office door is open to anyone and everyone who has a question, needs help with something, or just wants to come in and chat.

Being the go-for person means you're the person who runs out to the bank or the deli to get lunch for the office. You fill in for coworkers who are absent, take up office collections, and organizes the office carpool.

If you're one of those people, why does your lack of time and productivity surprise you? The fact is that your time and productivity are directly proportionate to your ability to say no!

Now, there's nothing wrong with being helpful and caring. In fact, you're probably very well-liked and appreciated by your coworkers because you're so helpful and friendly.

However, if your efficiency and productivity start to suffer, you really need to put your foot down. The same rule applies if you work from home or are having trouble getting home chores done. Kids running in and out asking for a snack or wanting to be driven somewhere, neighbors dropping in asking you to babysit or help organize a church bake sale... There can be just as many disruptions and distractions in a home environment as well.

**Quick fix:** Learn to say no and don't be afraid to say no. It's as simple as that. It doesn't mean you're mean or uncooperative. It simply means that you put your work first.

Don't be afraid of offending others because you don't have to be offensive about it. "I'm so sorry, Sue. I'd love to go out for pastries but I have to finish this report, and the deadline's looming." Or "I love chatting with you, Dan, but I'm really busy right now". Maybe we can go for coffee after work."

When you start learning to say no, you'll be amazed at how your productivity skyrockets and how much time you'll have to get things done. There's just one rule that you need to adhere to: be firm and stick to your guns.

## **6. Gossip**

For some unfathomable reason, gossip seems to be a favorite pastime at most workplaces.

How is this a productivity killer? First of all, it's a big time-waster. That 10-minute coffee break can stretch to 20 if there's a good bit of hot gossip to be shared. Trips to the water cooler become more frequent when you want to catch up on the latest buzz.

Secondly, gossiping makes you feel bad about yourself. You know you shouldn't be talking about other people and know that you'd feel very

hurt if your coworkers gossiped about you (which they probably do. Nobody's immune to office gossip!)

Gossiping may make you feel part of the crowd but when you get back to your work, your guilty conscience will probably distract you from getting back into proper focus. It can become a very vicious cycle.

**Quick fix:** Refrain from gossiping and avoid places where you know it takes place the most, such as the watercooler or smoking lounge. Avoid chronic gossipers and try to surround yourself with people who don't gossip. There will definitely be a few at your workplace.

Let it be known that you are a non-gossiper by not commenting on what others say. Your silence will speak volumes. Again, you don't need to be offensive or rude. Your behavior will simply let others know that you prefer not to gossip. You'll also boost your own self-pride and celebrate your integrity and values.

In fact, you'll gain a lot of respect - and the trust of your coworkers because they'll know you'll never share in any gossip about them!

## **7. Noise**

Noise is a huge mental distractor. We often don't notice it if we work in typically noisy environments and therefore don't see it as a real problem. But it can wreak havoc with your ability to organize your thoughts, focus your attention and retain information.

Unfortunately, we hear people saying that they perform at their best when listening to loud rock music on their headphones. But have you ever wondered why places like libraries and coworking spaces strictly enforce a rule of quiet? The bottom line is that noise is a distractor because it prevents your brain from functioning optimally. To test this, simply try writing a paragraph describing yourself. First, do this in a noisy place like a bustling café or a crowded park.

Next, write the same paragraph as you sit somewhere quiet. You'll find that you are able to think more clearly, organize and express your thoughts better and finish the task faster. When comparing the two pieces of writing, you'll almost always find that the second is much, much better.

**Quick fix:** There are several ways to avoid noise distractions depending on the nature of your work environment.

- Keep your office door closed.
- Use noise-blocking headphones if you work in an open office space.
- If you work at home. Make sure your workspace is in a part of the house that is quiet, such as a backroom that is away from the street.
- When working at home. Set firm rules that family members keep noise to a minimum.
- Block distracting street sounds and voices by listening to soft, relaxing music through headphones. The buzzwords here are 'soft' and 'relaxing'.

## 8. Clutter

Studies have shown that physical clutter causes mental clutter. Trying to work in cluttered surroundings overexerts the brain because even though you don't realize it, it's constantly processing the items, colors, and sounds around you. In addition, your brain is also busy processing your own thoughts and actions as you work. In other words, working in a cluttered space is like working with half a brain.

Clutter usually means disorganization as well. It can involve searching frantically through messy drawers for things you've misplaced. It could mean having to redo a task because you've lost your notes or other materials related to it. Merely sitting at a messy desk piled high with clutter can bring down your mood and sap your peace of mind.

Clutter, therefore, becomes a big time-sapper as well as a focus-sapper and mental stressor.

**Quick fix:** Get streamlined! Start by decluttering your workspace and storing or discarding what you don't use on a regular basis.

Your desktop should be clear of everything except for the bare essentials. Papers, files, and office supplies should be neatly organized in drawers where they can be accessed immediately. Office equipment and books should be organized on shelves.

The result should be an open, streamlined workspace that is comfortable and relaxing, well organized, and totally clutter-free. You'll literally feel as well as see an almost immediate improvement in your productivity. Extend this decluttering process to every room in your home and be amazed as you begin to gain amazing clarity, focus, and peace of mind. Now, when you want to get something done, you can be sure that your brain will give it its full attention.

## **9. Overthinking**

Highly productive people have one thing in common: the ability to take quick action and make timely decisions.

Overthinking can become a serious obstacle to productivity if you need to mull over every decision for hours, drown yourself in too many details, and endlessly keep weighing the outcomes and risks. You'll often end up more confused and uncertain than when you started.

Overthinking kills productivity in the following ways:

- It overcomplicates things.
- It leads to inaction rather than action.
- It magnifies fears and doubts.
- It's a massive time-waster
- It delays decision-making.
- It destroys your opportunity for advancing to a leadership position.
- It negatively affects and holds back people around you.

Overthinking is directly related to your inner self-talk, which is often negative. That's why it's called the inner critic. It's the voice that fuels your fear of failure and taking risks. It plays on your self-confidence by telling you that you're not skilled enough or prepared enough.

Your negative inner critic is what causes you to go off on wild tangents and create doom and gloom scenarios that paralyze you into inaction. The resulting hesitation and overthinking can debilitate you from taking decisive action when it's needed. The result can be devastating in cases where decisions need to be made quickly to mitigate losses or overcome setbacks. You don't need to ask how that will affect your overall performance.

**Quick fix:** Monitor your thoughts by writing them down in short bullet points. This is the issue, this is the decision or action you need to take, this is the information you have, and these are the potential outcomes.

This is the framework within which you need to work. When your inner voice starts up, banish it by focusing only on the points you've written. Practice making small decisions very quickly, almost without thinking. For example, ordering from a restaurant menu, choosing to buy a certain color of shoes or what to wear in the morning. This is great training for your brain to eliminate overthinking and become faster at decision-making.

## **10. Coffee & cigarette breaks**

Coffee breaks have their benefits and everyone enjoys them. They allow you to recharge your energy, stretch your legs and build rapport with coworkers. When they get out of hand, the cons can far outweigh the pros. In fact, 24.3% of surveyed employees admitted that cigarette and coffee breaks are their biggest work distractions.

Studies have found that the average employee spends 5-6 minutes on coffee and smoking breaks. Multiply that by 3-4 breaks a day, add lunch breaks and that's a very big chunk out of the day. But the real problem is that coffee and cigarette breaks can last longer than 5-6 minutes when people lose track of time. Sneaking out for a cigarette can be as frequent as every 30 minutes. What does this do for your focus and clarity? Certainly not much!

Frequent interruptions make it difficult to pick up where you left off and you'll need to waste more time to get comfortable, reorganize your thought and settle down to serious work. If not taken in moderation, coffee and cigarette breaks aren't so harmless after all!

**Quick fix:** Time your breaks by using your phone alert. More importantly, keep the number of breaks to a minimum. Remember, too much caffeine isn't good for you and smoking kills. You'll have to rely on sheer willpower at first but over time, you won't have to struggle as much. Smoke at your desk if your office policy allows it or if you work from home. A quick disclaimer here: this book in no way, shape or form condones the habit of smoking but realistically addresses a fact. Unfortunately, a lot of people are smokers.

Eliminate trips to the water cooler if you can. This is another huge timewaster that's as bad as coffee and cigarette breaks. Instead, keep a bottle of water at hand.

Likewise, consider bringing a thermos of coffee to work on days when you need to really focus on a certain task or project.

## **5 Simple Tips to Overcome Distractions**

Check out these 5 super simple tips to further equip you to avoid distractions:

### **1. Plan shorter tasks or break them up**

This allows you to wrap things up within a shorter timeframe while staying focused and motivated.

With each step completed, you feel more productive and eager to start on a new task.

### **2. Do a digital detox once a week**

The best time to do this is on weekends. Simply unplug from all your technology for 5-6 hours and just learn to live without it. It's just like fasting but in this case, you abstain from the consumption of technology.

It's one of the best ways to destress and calm your brain. You can choose to build up and over time you can digitally fast for a whole day!

This will bolster your quick fix for avoiding social media and cell phone distractions. Over time, you'll realize something amazing: you can live without technology - and social media!

### **3. Make sure you're comfortable.**

An uncomfortable position not only wreaks havoc on your posture but can be an unconscious distraction that affects focus and concentration. Make sure you're seated comfortably and that your back is straight. The need to constantly fidget and change your position can really affect the quality of your work.

Don't skimp on a good-quality chair and make sure your desk, computer monitor, and keyboard are at the right level to prevent you from craning your neck or bending forward. Make sure you also have room to stretch out your legs comfortably.

#### **4. Do brain teasers and solve puzzles**

This is a fun but powerful way to boost your overall cognitive function. Brain teasers and puzzles improve memory, critical thinking, concentration, and mental clarity. They're the perfect workout for building your mental muscle!

They also train your brain to be immersed in deep thought, making you less open to distractions.

#### **5. Sleep well**

Nothing balances and regenerates the brain and body like a good night's sleep. In a nutshell, a well-rested brain will not only perform at its peak but will also protect you from distractions.

# Conclusion

How many of these distractions are part of your daily life? The more of them you identify, the more you'll understand why you're not functioning at your peak. The quick fixes offered for each distraction will enable you to start boosting your productivity today. Most importantly, as you consistently practice these methods, they'll cease being quick fixes - they'll become lasting habits.

The result is that these 10 common distractions will be permanently banished from your life.

Living without distractions will guarantee that your days become significantly more stress-free, peaceful, and fulfilling. This is the perfect foundation for peak productivity and amazing success. In fact, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that eliminating distractions from your life will enable you to achieve your personal greatness!