

How Distractions Might Help You Stay Focused: 6 Tips

For Women & Co. by [Amy Paturel, AmyPaturel.com](#)



Although I haven't been professionally diagnosed with a behavioral disorder, I have an extremely limited attention span. I can't focus on anything—even TV—for more than two minutes at a time.

Fortunately, there's hope for people who are easily distracted, like me: New research suggests divided attention may boost productivity. The [study, published in *The Journal of Applied Psychology*](#), found that distractions—particularly as they pertain to group brainstorming—can be a good thing. What's more, designated “quiet hours,” which are often touted as a

way to enhance efficiency, actually led to lower performance among workers in an office environment.

The authors speculate that setting tight boundaries on communication limits motivation and creativity. By contrast, office interruptions can actually help workers gain a fresh perspective on the task at hand (once they get back to it!).

“The brain likes novelty, which is created whenever there are disruptions,” said [Caroline Adams Miller, MAPP](#), professional coach and co-author of *Creating Your Best Life*. “Plus, when you jump from task to task, your brain continues to work on finding solutions,” she said.

Miller recommended the following tips on how to make the most of office disruptions:

1. Make a list.

Advanced planning is the number one way to prevent stress. If you struggle with maintaining focus, experts agree it's important to start every day with a clear agenda. Take into account what time of day is most productive for you and schedule tasks accordingly.

2. Create an open-door policy.

People who tend to ask others for their input tend to be more productive. Being in the company of people who think differently from you creates “Eureka!” moments, so occasionally being interrupted by others could lead to “disruptive innovation.”

3. Encourage brevity.

Ask co-workers to be clear and specific when asking a question or making a point. Ted Turner is infamous for standing up and ending a meeting when people can't get to the point within five minutes.

4. Turn on the elevator music.

Listening to certain types of music—pieces you strongly like or dislike—can impede productivity. Other types of music, however, can help you stay focused

and on task, particularly if you aren't distracted by words that entice your brain to translate what you're hearing.

5. Let your mind wander.

Studies show that occasionally taking a mental break can boost creativity. If you let your mind wander, your "executive network" is still firing in the background, which can trigger "aha moments." The goal is to catch bright ideas before they fade, so if one suddenly surfaces, write it down.

6. Welcome quiet moments.

Many of us experience a sort of Zen-like work mode during extended air travel. The lack of cell phone access, wireless Internet, and urgent requests translates to long stretches of uninterrupted time to focus, create, and strategize. Certain types of work require contemplation and depend on quiet hours while other types of work don't require that level of focused attention. Bottom line: Make full use of quiet time when you have it, but don't underestimate your potential in busy environments.

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