5 Tactics to Stay Focused and Achieve That One Big Goal

Use these five techniques to get out of your own way (and head) to maintain focus and accomplish your tasks.

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I was inspired to share these thoughts after reading *107 Ways to Stick to It* by Lee J. Colan.

To start, think about a lion tamer in an old-timey circus. Every lion tamer used three tools to control his fierce companions prowling around the cage: a whip, a stool and a handful of tasty snacks.

Of these tools, the most valuable was the stool. Why is that? When the lion tamer lifts the stool to face his snarling friends, the lions see the four stool legs and cannot focus on a particular leg. As a result, they stand frozen.

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Similarly, the same can happen to us when we try to focus on too many things; we freeze, or we might focus on the wrong things. Either option will take the roar out of your success.

I recently moved. I went from a big house to a small house yet thought all the things from the big house would fit into the new small house. They did not. Oh, how they did not. On day one in the new house, I felt like Chris Farley, a *big man in a little coat.* I panicked. Then I made a list. A really really long list. Then I picked the most important thing I wanted to

keep and from there was able to jump into pairing down my stuff. I maintained my sanity over the next three months by always bringing myself back to using the following five techniques that highly successful people have used to sharpen their focus and get things done:

1. Identify your “one thing”

Yes, you have a list as long as your leg of tasks to accomplish. You can’t get to it all (believe me, I’ve tried) and if you continue to look at the entire list, you’ll become overwhelmed and find yourself on the couch watching reruns of *Friends* while eating ice cream directly from the carton. Pick the item for which you need to start; the item that will catapult all the other actions. Whether it’s clearing out your inbox or taking the first step on a large project, never let anything less important take priority over it during the time you’ve set aside for that task. As Josh Billings advises, “Be like a postage stamp. Stick to one thing until you get there.”

2. Learn when to say “no”

Your time, energy and money are precious resources. If you spend them in one area, you cannot spend them in another area. Saying “no” to one thing means you can say”yes” to something else. Say “no” to anything that prevents you from focusing on what’s most important. Really, this means to compartmentalize and stick to the promise you made to yourself to accomplish the thing you want to accomplish. If today you’re working on cleaning out the bedroom, don’t shift mid-way and start doing your taxes. Do what you’re doing and tune out the rest.

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3. Keep it very simple

Complexity is the enemy of focus. Simplicity keeps the line of sight to your goal clear and direct. If today is the day to clean out your kid's old school papers, don't allow time to read and reminisce over each handprint or note from a teacher if that's not your goal. Keep your objectives clear and keep moving forward.

4. Life rewards action… so dive in and get to work!

You're never ready to start anything. That said, just start. Tasks usually appear larger than they really are and being in the process provides clarity, diminishes the perceived effort required, and builds momentum toward your goal.

5. Worry wrecks your focus

Acknowledge it, validate your feelings and then follow rule no. 4. We all worry, but the technique here is to minimize the time between your first worried thought and your first action to attack it. Much of our worry is based on concerns in our minds, not reality. Mark Twain once said, "I've suffered a great many catastrophes in my life. Most of them never happened."

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How many emails are open on your desktop as you read this? Or how many lingering items do you have on your to-do list? Perhaps, it's time to identify one task or project and stick to it. Think about the one thing that absolutely needs your attention and when accomplished will help to propel you forward. So, go, be like a stamp and stick!

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