

## Zeroing in

### Getting set mentally to do important tasks first and foremost

**W**hy is focus important?

**Martini:** Being focused is one of the key ingredients to performing at an optimal level. It makes you more effective since you are able to concentrate on thinking through issues and projects much more clearly and comprehensively.

Focus also enables you to get into “the flow” more often and more seamlessly, which gives you the ability to have more frequent “a-ha” moments and to push the boundaries of your creativity. It also makes you more efficient at the various tasks you perform so that you are able to handle a greater volume of work over a shorter period of time.

All of these factors contribute to enhancing the level of your performance, which will ultimately help you to differentiate yourself in the marketplace.

**Susler:** I would add that focus enables you to drown out the noise of outside distractions, enabling you to maintain your train of thought and, quite simply, to get your work done.

Focus also enhances delivery of good client service. More than just focusing on paperwork, the concept includes focusing on the person you are with. Whether that person is your boss or your client, they will have a much better experience and appreciation for you and for the interaction as a result of you giving them your full attention.

**What are some of the reasons it can be difficult to maintain your focus?**

**Martini:** When you are distracted by things going on around you rather than concentrating on what’s in front of you, it can be tough to focus.

It is easy to become scattered, which often happens when you are not completely clear on what is truly important to you and then developing your list of priorities based on those things. If you are spread too thin, or overtired and overly stressed, it can have a paralyzing effect. It is also tough when your work environment and habits are not conducive to developing and maintaining your focus.

It is like having a finely tuned instrument or a well-developed muscle — it requires a significant commitment and determination to concentrate on the present moment, to the exclusion of everything else.

**Susler:** There are so many distractions during the workday. My days are filled with the telephone ringing, clients walking into



#### Inside Out

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Watch them talk more about this topic with the Better Government Association’s Andy Shaw at [chicagolawyer magazine.com](http://chicagolawyer magazine.com). To submit a question for future columns, e-mail [questions.insideout@gmail.com](mailto:questions.insideout@gmail.com).

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my office, a constant barrage of e-mails — all of which are raising new questions and issues across a broad spectrum of substantive areas and most assuredly disrupting my intended schedule or agenda for the day. This can be quite jarring to your ability to focus.

However, this leads back to the first question and explains why focus is so important, especially the ability to

focus quickly on each new issue while pivoting from one person to another, one matter to another, one substantive area to another.

**What are some techniques you can use to improve your focus?**

**Martini:** There is a certain mindfulness that is necessary in order to maintain your focus, particularly over a sustained period of time.

The trick is to figure out how to get yourself to that place.

I learned how to meditate a number of years ago and have found that it helps me to quiet my mind and get more in touch with my intuitive side. This helps to create a sense of inner calm and peace within so that I can stay more focused on what I am doing and remove the clutter of my mind so that I can perform to my full potential.

It is also critical to develop a work style and environment that enables you to concentrate on what’s in front of you.

Whether it is turning off your phone and e-mail for a while and closing your door, or taking a walk to clear your mind before jumping into a project, you need to develop ways that work for you so that you can minimize distractions.

**Susler:** This will vary from person to person. One technique I use is working to music; I actually find its absence distracting.

Like Tina, I meditate every morning before leaving for work. I recommend taking breaks

once in a while to clear your head, even if you just take a few seconds to close your eyes, take a couple of deep breaths and center yourself.

You might try to take some time to do several quick tasks to clear off your to-do list so they don’t nag at you while you are trying to focus on a longer or more difficult task.

If you need to focus for a long period of time on a single project such as writing a brief, try a change of scenery — a coffee shop, library or even working at home. ■

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