



# Mastery Coaching & Consulting

*master your day, master your life*

MasteryConsulting.net • 215.460.6173



**DISTRACTED?**

**SKILLS FOR FINESSING FOCUS**



## IT HAPPENS EVERY TIME.

At some point in the discussion of the mechanics of planning, schedules and tasks in my time management classes, someone will eventually ask, “How do I stop being so scattered? I procrastinate and can’t get things done.”

I can’t focus!  
How do I stop  
being so  
scattered?

Ah, yes. I was waiting for you to ask. There is that pesky problem of how to focus on what you need to do.

Buying all the spiffy calendars in the world won’t take distraction away, no matter what the office supply ads promise.

Yet there are ways to manage distraction, overcome procrastination and get stuff done. But rather than thinking about distraction and procrastination, let’s talk about the opposite, which is what the question is really about: how to improve your ability to focus on demand. That’s the key—on demand.

Focus is ignoring distractions and staying on a dedicated course until you achieve what you set out to do.

Some people can muster focus with little effort. For the rest of us it’s a little harder, especially if Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is in play.

What does it take to create focus?



Well, you can try the organic method of waiting until you feel like starting a task.

But you’re reading this because that doesn’t work.



### The best ways to help you comfortably get focused are:

- Working with your mind and body
- Creating focus-boosting surroundings
- Practicing healthy habits

Despite what you may believe now, you can train yourself to skillfully notice and correct the distractions in in your internal and external environments. Use the tools of listening to your mind, feeling your body, exploring what works best for your unique self and giving yourself permission to do what you know works.

### SKILL 1 – WORK WITH YOUR MIND

It's logical advice to remind you to be an objective observer, noticing when you don't focus well and when you do. But how do you do that when you're distracted? That's like asking someone how they could not remember something. They don't know, they've forgotten it.

You've learned a lot of skills in your life that weren't intuitive. You can learn to use these are tips, tricks and tools too.

Just like when we request others to remind us of something, asking others to notice that we're distracted only works once or twice. They'll tire of that pretty quickly. Your lack of focus and procrastination aren't their issue.

Better to learn the clues that signal you're distracted and procrastinating. Notice when you:



Catch yourself looking in the fridge for something new to eat for the third time in 20 minutes and you're the only one home.

- Wander the office, visiting people you haven't talked to face to face since the last time you had an onerous task.



- Realize your eyes are drying out because you've been staring motionless at the screen for so long.
- Reach for the phone to call someone you haven't spoken to in years.
- Hear yourself say, again, "This isn't worth my time. I have too much else to do. I'll do it later."

And yet we know by the time 'later' arrives, it's doubly difficult because of the stress from being late *and* berating yourself for being a procrastinator.

### Working with your ADD mind in full gear?

If you use medications to boost your attention, are you taking it on schedule and according to need? Set alarms. Know what the best dosages are for you.

Is there someone who can sit quietly near you to help you absorb their calm? (No, that's not weird, I do that for many people of all ages because it works.)

Do you focus better when moving, or standing instead of sitting? There are stand-up desks designed with you in mind. Try rolling a ball under your feet to provide unobtrusive, focusing movement or fidgeting with something in your hands.

### Contain your inner critic

Our subversive inner negative voices interfere with our focusing abilities and manufacture reasons to attend elsewhere.



Start by telling the negative voice to pipe down and quit interrupting you.

Practicing realistic and optimistic self-talk helps change your inner voice and attitude, making it more likely you can retain focus. "I can't do this today" guarantees mental and physical wandering.



Keep your attitude positive by changing your self-talk. Come up with a script for the positive voice. “I can do this for just 15 minutes” is balm to your procrastinator mind.

## SKILL 2 – WORK WITH YOUR BODY

Your body, through your senses, will not let you ignore it; it will hijack your brain every time.

If you’re in pain, hungry or thirsty, stressed, over-excited, depressed, tired, too warm or too cold, or in any other agitated state your focusing abilities are diminished. Take a walk, get a snack and a drink, get a sweater, nap, turn on a fan.

### Create focus-boosting surroundings

Think back to what elements were place when you felt you focused and craft your surroundings to create it again.

Sound	Do you focus well with soft sounds, or music without lyrics, but are distracted by singing voices? Perhaps music distracts you altogether and you do best in silence. If background sounds become noise, use a ‘white noise’ machine. <a href="#">Relax Melodies</a> is a wonderful free app for your phone seemingly endless ways to customize your sounds.
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Lighting	You realize you’re irritated by the blue and buzz of fluorescent lighting but a shaded incandescent lamp is comforting. Turn off what bothers you and treat yourself to lights that please and soothe you. Include a ‘task light’ that highlights your work area and decorative lights that make you feel positive.
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Visuals	Sleek, spare places may be inviting; decluttering your work area can make your space more inspiring.
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Perhaps a plant nearby corrals your attention from wandering to see what’s more interesting to look at than what’s in front of you.

Choosing different surrounding colors may help. If you can’t paint the area, then add fabrics or art to not only inspire and give your eyes a place to gaze without distraction when you need to think about what you’re doing.



### SKILL 3 – PRACTICE HEALTHY HABITS

Health self-care habits extend beyond food and sleep. They're also about treating ourselves with compassion, striving to learn better ways of being and doing, knowing what works for someone else may not work for us, and being as consistent as possible in using our skills.

#### Respect your effort by practicing “THIS AND THAT”

When you've chosen your best time and place to work on something that requires hard-to-catch focus, respect your choice and remember that THIS is the priority for THIS time and place. You've made your decision that there is nothing that is more important at THIS time. If there is really and truly something more that *must* be done at this time, then you're procrastinating about THAT and not chosen the best time and place for THIS task. Yes, there are always lots of other things that *could* be done and, for now, THIS is not a waste of your time, it is the best use of your time.

#### Set a timer

Start with 15 minutes and stay the entire 15 minutes, even if you're not focusing on the task at hand. The goal here is to calm your mind and not allow yourself to walk away or substitute a more enjoyable activity than the one you've already chosen as worthy of your precious time. Pick up your pen or open your computer (but not your email or the news).

You'll often find that within that time you will settle in and begin to on your task. If the first 15 minutes don't quite do it, set the timer for another 10.

#### Take a break

If that doesn't work, then take a longer break and start again. By this second or maybe third time, you will probably realize what's stopping you from completing your tasks. It's usually that we're perplexed about something. What's the actual first step? Is there a crucial information missing? Is the goal and process clear?



The trick to this one is to make sure you return!





### Feel your success

Allow yourself to settle into what you're doing. Drop your shoulders. Stop holding your breath and inhale and exhale more mindfully. Notice your automatic thoughts and let them pass by. Feel the calm.

### Reward your efforts

When you reach a good stopping point, jot down what comes next, then stretch, take a break, and take a moment for refreshment. Taking a break recharges your mind. Marathon work sessions serve only to wear you out and create negative memories, which will sabotage your next effort.

By focusing on your mind, your body and your surroundings you can more consistently move past procrastination, finesse focus and master your day.

**YES, YOU CAN FINESSE YOUR FOCUS AND EVEN ENJOY THE VIEW.**





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Leslie Robison believes we create our best life one day at time and has been coaching, organizing, expediting and guiding people toward their goals since 1999.

Trained and experienced as a coach & professional organizer, she continually inspires, helps, and collaborates with curious and motivated people as they create better situations at home and at work.



She's authored teaching materials and trained peers during her years of affiliation with the National Association of Professional Organizers and the Institute for Challenging Disorganization and was taught excellence in coaching by Coach U and others.

Most importantly, for over 20 years of continually learning about adult thinking and behavior, she's learned from all clients and is proud to relay that experience to helping others.

## Services

Coaching	Easy, effective, convenient, by phone, keeps you on track
Classes	Easily learn realistic ways to master your time, space and information

**Follow Leslie** on her [blog](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#), call 215-460-6173, or email [Leslie@MasteryConsulting.net](mailto:Leslie@MasteryConsulting.net)

*Leslie is able to reframe a situation so that you can see it, understand it, from a perspective you wouldn't have considered. That leads to new insights and answers that weren't evident. Robert H.*