



DEFEATING DIGITAL DISTRACTIONS

*A Mindfulness for Lawyers
Workshop*

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Digital Distraction: Statistics

- The average American checks their phone about 80 times per day.
- The average American spends over four hours a day on their phone.
- The average worker shifts computer windows 566 times per day.
- 80% of smartphone owners check their phone within 15 minutes of waking up. For 80% of those people, checking their phone is the very first thing they do.
- In a 2014 study of college students, two-thirds of the men and one fourth of the women chose to give themselves electric shocks rather than sit for six minutes without external distractions.

Lawyers and Technology: Statistics

- According to the 2017 and 2018 American Bar Association TechReports:
 - “[I]t’s common for lawyers to do online legal work (like checking email, working on documents, or scheduling appointments) away from their office as much as from their desk.”
 - 77% of surveyed lawyers in traditional law offices also work regularly from home.
 - 96% of surveyed lawyers use a smartphone at least occasionally to do legal work. “At 96% smartphone adoption, it is fair to say that all lawyers are now remote workers.”
 - 50.1% of surveyed lawyers often or sometimes experience negative impacts on their productivity from technology-related problems.

Stress in the Legal Profession: Statistics

- In a 2016 study of 12,825 lawyers:
 - 61% of participants reported concerns with anxiety in their careers.
 - 46% of participants reported concerns with depression in their careers.
 - 23% were experiencing mild or higher levels of stress at the time of the study.
 - 33% were problem drinkers.
- A 2013 study of 2,226 British lawyers found that lawyers' primary causes of stress were:
 - Workload (60% of respondents)
 - Client expectations (42%)
 - Number of hours (18%)

Optimizing Your Task

- The Pomodoro System:
 - One “Pomodoro” = 25 minutes of focused work + five-minute break.
 - Do your best to stick to one task for the entire Pomodoro.
 - Every fourth Pomodoro, take a 15-minute break rather than five.
 - You can adjust the lengths as you like.
- Benefits of the Pomodoro System:
 - Creates defined “container” for the task, which aids focus
 - Promotes single-tasking
 - Makes passage of time more tangible
 - Replenishes focus via short breaks

Optimizing Your Task, cont.

- Enhancements to the Pomodoro System:
 - At the start of each Pomodoro, declare your task, either out loud or in writing.
 - If you get distracted during a Pomodoro, apply a light mental label to the distraction (*e.g.*, “thinking,” “hearing,” or simply “distraction”).
- “Chunking” a task into manageable pieces:
 - Assign the task a set number of Pomodoros after which you’ll switch to another task, returning later if necessary.
 - Remember that a break is never more than 25 minutes away.
- Recommended Pomodoro apps:
 - iPhone: BeFocused, Forest
 - Android: ClearFocus, Forest

Training Focus: Meditation

The Posture:

- Straight spine.
- Feet under the knees, flat on the floor.
- Try sitting toward the edge of the chair.
- For more, google “posture-pedia” to find Stephanie Nash’s thorough posture guide.

The Technique:

- Rest attention on the sensations of breath at the nose.
- When you notice attention has wandered, gently return to the breath.
- Breathe normally.

Meditation Pointers

- Meditation is not about emptying the mind. Let the whole rich landscape of sounds, sensations, and thoughts continue in the background.
- Your mind will wander, and that's okay. This isn't about stopping the wandering; that's impossible. It's about noticing and gently guiding the mind back.
- When you notice you've wandered, briefly savor that recognition before returning.
- Apply gentle effort. No need to strain.
- There is no failing at this, no doing well or poorly. There's only practicing or not.
- Optional: apply a light mental label to a distraction (*e.g.*, “thinking,” “itching”).

Boosting Focus: Diet and Exercise

- Research shows that even a single session of light exercise can improve concentration and cognitive flexibility (though repeated exercise appears to be more beneficial).
- Studies suggest that adding certain foods and nutrients to your diet can improve focus:
 - Caffeine (but beware addiction and tolerance as results of overuse)
 - Blueberries
 - Leafy greens
 - Fish oil or other sources of omega-3 fatty acids

Making Devices Less Distracting

Smartphones, apps, and social media are engineered to exploit psychological flaws and trigger compulsive behavior.

- We can combat this attentional hijacking by:
 - neutralizing the slot-machine-like use of color and novelty
 - introducing small amounts of friction to prevent unconscious usage
- Hide addictive apps in folders, preferably on the second page of a folder so you can't see the apps from the home screen.
- Access apps via the phone's search function.
- Turn off autofill for your social media passwords.
- Turn off all unnecessary app notifications. (You might turn them off for personal emails and leave them on for work emails.)

Making Devices Less Distracting, cont.

- Wear a smartwatch, which can handle many of your smartphone's functions and has a less addictive interface.
- Switch your phone's display to grayscale.

- iPhone:

Settings > General > Accessibility > Display Accommodations > Color Filters > tap the switch, then select "Grayscale."

Then, if you like, go to Settings > General > Accessibility > Accessibility Shortcut, then select "Color Filters." This will let you turn grayscale on and off by triple-clicking the home button (or, on iPhone X, the side button).

- Android: this varies by phone. Google your phone type and "grayscale."

Making Devices Less Distracting, cont.

- Use a distraction blocker app:
 - iPhone: Screen Time (built into “Settings”)
 - Android, PC, and Mac: Cold Turkey (<http://getcoldturkey.com>) or Freedom (<http://freedom.to>)
- Install the Chrome extension “News Feed Eradicator” (you can find it by Googling) to block the Facebook news feed while leaving the site’s other features intact. (It works only for the Google Chrome web browser.)

Mindful Internet Use

Resisting distraction while using the internet is extremely challenging. Be patient with yourself.

- Avoid multitasking; take on one internet task at a time.
- Use these steps to carry out online tasks without getting lost in distraction:
 1. Before going online, declare your purpose.
 2. Acknowledge how easy it is to get distracted online and resolve to be vigilant.
 3. Go online. When you notice the urge toward distraction arising, give it a mental label (e.g., “the Urge” or simply “distraction”).
- At first, you won’t think to label the urge until long after you’ve gotten distracted. This will change with practice.

About the Author

Jon Krop, J.D., has taught mindfulness at Harvard, Yale, the Pentagon, the world's top law firms, Fortune 100 companies, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and many other organizations.

After graduating from Harvard Law School, Jon clerked on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit and worked as a litigator at firms in Los Angeles and New York City.

Jon has practiced mindfulness for over twelve years and studied with masters from around the world. In 2014, Jon completed a seven-month silent meditation retreat.

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