

1. HOW TO USE THE UN-SCHEDULE

The UN-SCHEDULE turns our natural resistance to structure and authority—one of the principle causes of procrastination—against itself and enlists it in the cause of productivity. For years you've been telling yourself to work longer hours and to try harder on difficult projects. The UN-SCHEDULE and the Guilt-Free Play strategic system helps you to put more time into your leisure and more quality into your work. It tells you to put more time and guilt-free fun into your play time.

Experiment with making the following commitments to yourself:

- I will play, dance, or exercise at least 30 min. every day
- I will take at least one day off each week
- I will start by aiming for only 30 minutes of quality, uninterrupted work
- I will start working on an imperfect—perfectly human—draft rather than perfection
- I will start small and keep starting until I'm finished

This strategy reverses your fear of being overwhelmed and your fear of failure and turns them into powerful tools for developing healthy work habits. Our usual habit is to schedule our work time and to leave our play reasonably unstructured. By requiring you to schedule and commit to recreational time, and to limit your work activity at first to short, pre-determined periods of 30 minutes, the UN-SCHEDULE builds up a subconscious desire to work more and really enjoy your play.

Guidelines for Filling in Your UN-SCHEDULE

1. SCHEDULE ONLY:

- a) previously committed time—meals, sleep, meetings, classes, holidays
- b) free time, recreation, leisure reading
- c) socializing
- d) health activities such as swimming, running, tennis
- e) routine structured events such as commuting time, classes, medical appointments

The primary principle of un-scheduling is that first you fill-in your UN-SCHEDULE with as many non-work activities as possible. This helps you overcome the fantasy that you have 24 hours a day and 48 hours on the weekends to work on your projects. It will sharpen your perception of the actual time available and make you a better manager of your time.

Do not schedule work on projects. Remember, first and foremost the UN-SCHEDULE guarantees you guilt-free play time and the legitimacy of your personal time and living a balanced life. This first step will help you avoid scaring yourself with overly ambitious and overly dictatorial plans for work that are doomed to failure, disappointment, and self-criticism.

2. FILL IN WORK TIME ON YOUR UN-SCHEDULE ONLY AFTER YOU HAVE COMPLETED AT LEAST 1/2 HOUR.

Think of the UN-Schedule as a time clock that you punch in as you start work and you punch out when you take credit for your progress. Use different colors for separate projects. Lawyers and architects use a similar system called “billable hours.” You'll find that you'll build excitement about what you've accomplished rather than anxiety about how much more there is to do.

3. TAKE CREDIT ONLY FOR PERIODS OF WORK THAT REPRESENT AT LEAST 30 MINUTES OF UNINTERRUPTED WORK.

Do not record the time on your UN-Schedule if you stop before 30 minutes are up. The discipline of staying with the task through the first few minutes of potential distractions and inertia is necessary to carry you through to creative solutions (moving from not-knowing to knowing) and greater interest in your work. When you stay with the discipline of uninterrupted work you really know that the half hour you earned on your UN-Schedule represents quality work, not trips to get potato chips or calls to a friend. This mounting achievement will build your pride and confidence in yourself as a producer.

4. REWARD YOURSELF WITH A BREAK OR A CHANGE TO A MORE ENJOYABLE TASK AFTER EACH 30, 60, OR 90 MINUTE PERIOD WORKED.

You deserve it. You got started! And by overcoming inertia, you have begun to build momentum that will make it easier to get started next time. By rewarding yourself for each positive achievement, you are creating positive associations with your work instead of negative ones, creating a new and better habit,—the Now Habit.

5. KEEP TRACK OF THE NUMBER OF QUALITY HOURS WORKED EACH DAY AND EACH WEEK.

Total them up. Emphasize what you did accomplish. This is rewarding in itself and establishes a positive pattern by following work with a pat on the back. It also alerts you to those days when you may choose to start earlier on high priority projects in order to increase the number of hours worked on a particular day of the week.

6. LEAVE AT LEAST 8-24 HOURS A WEEK FOR RECREATION AND ANY SMALL CHORES YOU WISH TO TAKE CARE OF.

This helps you avoid the resentment and burnout that follows when your life has become all work and no holidays. Include in each week family rituals of renewal, recreation and play. You'll feel more motivated to return to your high priority projects after resting. Work will be less of a burden when you are experiencing the better parts of life now. Take time for yourself and those low priority chores that you might actually enjoy removing from your "to do" list as a change of pace—repairs around the house, gardening, or letters that you've put off writing. This day is essential for rejuvenation and the maintenance of creativity and motivation. Recreation gives your creative brain time to work for you.

7. SLIP 15-30 MINUTES OF WORK IN BEFORE TAKING A BREAK OR GOING OUT.

Get started on difficult tasks so it will be easier to return to them later. To gain control over your habits, follow work on difficult projects with pleasurable activities in order to reinforce and create motivation for facing challenges.

Use your most frequent, "high occurrence" behaviors—generally your favorite activities—as tools for motivation to increase and reinforce any positive habit you want to strengthen. Beware that if, for example, you watch TV after giving up on a project, giving up will become an even stronger habit because it is followed by a reward. Conversely, if balancing the books/ writing/ painting precede the watching of TV/ eating/ emailing/ sleeping, a positive habit is formed. By facing tasks that you fear or find boring for 15-30 minutes -- and then follow them with guilt-free play activities—getting started becomes associated with pleasure and you'll be drawn to engage in those tasks more easily and frequently.

By using this "Grandma's Principle"—you get ice cream only after you eat your spinach—you can get started with less pain and foster the creation of good habits.

Soon you'll find that work that previously was difficult or unpleasant becomes easier and more enjoyable.

This technique can become a springboard for getting started on avoided projects. It

- 1) utilizes your attraction to the pleasurable activity to get you started more often;
- 2) allows you to enjoy the leisure activity guilt-free; and
- 3) starts your subconscious mind working on the project while you play—creatively resolving blocks while your attention is else-where—and increases your motivation to return to the task with your new found solutions.

8. FOCUS ON STARTING.

Your task is to get to the starting place on time. Advantage: Your "to do" list needs only one A-priority item—"WHEN IS THE NEXT TIME I CAN START?" Replace all thoughts about finishing with thoughts about when, where, and on what you can start. Post this question in several places at work and at home.

9. THINK SMALL.

Do not aim to finish a book, mail letters, complete income tax, or even do 4 hours of continuous work. This will make you feel overwhelmed and in need of some low priority project that you can accomplish within minutes rather than the hours, weeks, or months it takes to complete the really important tasks of life. Aim to start for 30 minutes of quality, focused work. [You always have the option to renew for an additional 15-30 minutes.]

10. KEEP STARTING.

Finishing will take care of itself. When it's time to start the last 30 minutes that will finish the project, that too will be an act of starting—the start of the conclusion of your current project. So forget about finishing and asking, "How will I ever finish?" If you must worry, worry about starting. In order to finish, that's all you have to do: keep on starting.

11. NEVER END DOWN. Don't stop working when you're blocked or at the end of a chapter or section. Remember "grandma's principle:" you get your ice cream only after you finish your spinach. To create good habits, your breaks must come after doing some work. To avoid creating poor work habits, never take a break (a reward) when you're at the end of a segment or when you're ready to give up. Always stay with a tough spot for another 5 or 10 minutes to see what "comes to you." If you remain open and curious about a how you'll solve a problem, your brain will know to access your subconscious creative genius. Say, "This is going to be interesting. I'm expecting a surprise."

You'll find that staying with a difficult task for a few more moments is often enough for your brain to creatively resolve it. Gently pushing through a block or starting on the next section before you quit creates positive momentum that makes it much easier to get started next time, thus eliminating the need to procrastinate.

Face the fear for a few more seconds [the equivalent of one to three deep breaths] and you'll be building immunity to fear. You'll give yourself a "fear inoculation shot" every time you stay and face the monster rather than run away.

Within 2 weeks of using the UN-SCHEDULE you can expect a broader awareness of your work patterns and how you're spending your time. For example, you will most likely observe that as you structure more leisure activities into your schedule, these oases of relaxation lessen the terror of feeling overwhelmed by large work projects. You'll find that pre-scheduled breaks and commitments to lunch and exercise increase confidence in your ability to tackle important projects in manageable steps, interspersed with adequate time to gain distance on blocks and to return to work with greater motivation and creative solutions.

Go to <http://www.neilfiore.com/nowhabit.html> for sample un-schedules and for blank schedules.

FRAN'S SCHEDULE

ACTIVITIES	TIME (IN MINUTES)
I. MORNING, AT HOME (7:00 A.M.-9:15 A.M.)	
Listening to radio before getting out of bed	15
Stretching, sit ups, yoga	10
Shower	15
Dress	20
Breakfast while watching TV	30
Dropping off laundry, picking up laundry for evening, arranging papers for club meeting	15
Commuting	30
Segment Total	2 hr., 15 min
II. MORNING, AT WORK (9:15 A.M.-12:45 P.M.)	
Chatting with boss	10
Reading mail, newspaper	20
Phone, outgoing call	15
Daydreaming, plans for shopping	10
Clearing desk, looking for folders	15
Break, coffee, socializing	15
WORK, LOW PRIORITY—C's	45
Phone, incoming call	20
WORK, HIGH PRIORITY—A's	60
Segment Total	3 hr., 30 min
III. AFTERNOON, AT WORK (12:45 P.M.-6:15 P.M.)	
Lunch, socializing	75
Return phone calls	30
Meeting	60
WORK, LOW PRIORITY BUT URGENT—C+'s	30
Break	15
WORK, HIGH PRIORITY- A's	45
Consultation	30
WORK, INTERMEDIATE PRIORITY—B's	30
Cleaning up, organizing for tomorrow's meeting	15
Segment Total	5 hr., 30 min
IV. EVENING, AT HOME (6:15 P.M.-11:30 P.M.)	
Commute	30
Shopping	20
Socializing, reading mail	15
Exercise	25
Shower	10
Preparing for / helping with dinner	30
Dinner	45
TV	60
Phone	20
Paying bills, balancing checkbook	20
Reading	30
Cleaning up for sleep	10
Segment Total	5 hr., 15 min

PROCRASTINATION LOG

WHEN	ACTIVITY	THOUGHTS/ FEELINGS	ACTION	RESULTS: THOUGHT & FEELINGS
1. 2/6, 9:30 am	Income Tax, A	"I don't want to. It's too nice outside."	Started on one file; then took a walk	Glad I got started and enjoyed my walk
2. 2/7, 10 am	Screen Door, B	"Can't I rest on the weekend?"	Watched TV	Felt Guilty, blamed myself for laziness, afraid of wife's anger
3. 2/9 3:15 pm	Speech, AAA	"It has to be exceptional."	Got coffee and arranged some papers	Felt more anxious, felt bad about myself— out of control
4. 2/10, 9:30 am	Jones Case, A	"I can't face Judge Smith unprepared	Worked on a low priority task instead	Felt more pressure as time passes

FRAN'S STEP ONE

HOURS	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
6-7	SLEEP	SLEEP	SLEEP	SLEEP	SLEEP	SLEEP	SLEEP
7-8	↓	←	EXERCISE	SHOWER	BREAKFAST	→	↓
8-9	SUNDAY PAPER	←	←	COMMUTE	→	→	TENNIS
9-10	BRUNCH	WORK	WORK	WORK	WORK	WORK	BRUNCH
10-11	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	
11-12							SHOP
12-1	HIKE						CHORES
1-2	HIKE						
2-3	HIKE						GARDENING
3-4							↓
4-5							HOURS
5-6		↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	SHOWER

6-7	DINNER	←	←	COMMUTE	(SHOP)	→	BOB
7-8		AEROBICS	BOB	AEROBICS	DINNER	AEROBICS	DINNER
8-9	BILLS	DINNER	↓	→	SYMPHONY	DINNER	MOVIE
9-10	PLAN WEEK		↓	SKI CLUB	↓	WITH	↓
10-11				↓	↓	ALAN + RUTH	↓
11-12					HOURS	MAIL BILLS	↓
12-1	←	←	←	SLEEP	→		
1-2						SLEEP	→
2-3							
3-4							
4-5	1.28; .50	1.00; .50	1.00	1.00	.75	.75	GUILT
5-6	.50; .75						FREE
TOTAL	3.00	1.50	1.00	1.00	.75	.75	PLAY

WEEKS TOTAL = 8.00 HOURS

USING THE BLANK SCHEDULE

Note that I've left you 24 hours each day to schedule work and play so that you can:

- 1) account for every hour—including sleep and meals—thereby breaking the illusion that you have 24-hour days and 48-hour weekends for work; and,
- 2) adapt your schedule to night shifts and morning or evening work habits

Make 4 copies of the blank, 24-hour schedule for each week of the month, or use 5 x 8 index cards to make your own blank schedule, or adapt the concepts to fit with your PDA or daily planner.

2. ADJUSTMENTS TO YOUR UN-SCHEDULE

Over the years, I've found that there are a number of discoveries everyone seems to make when they begin to use the UN-SCHEDULE:

- You're probably busier than you thought. Discriminate between urgent versus important tasks; drop or delegate some projects, and make more hours available for your top priority goals and for guilt-free play.
- Certain days are less productive than others. On those days you'll need to focus on starting one of your top priority projects first thing in the morning in order to break through inertia and start the day with positive momentum.
- 30 minutes of uninterrupted work on one project is enough to break through fear and inertia, and to get started.
- After a few weeks you may find that you've stopped filling out the UN-SCHEDULE. This may work fine when you're really cooking on a project, but later you won't have an accurate record of unexpected interruptions. You won't know what's keeping you from being even more efficient or how you spent your time. Return to filling in leisure and life commitments (e.g. sleep, meals, commuting, exercise, socializing) and commit to starting on work projects.
- You may prefer to have a consistent time at which to start each day—making it easier to create a healthy habit. Schedule, as early as possible in your day, a specific half hour for starting on your major project.
- You need a plan to deal with your worrying—“what if”—mind. This part needs to know the plan for survival and protection against criticism and loss. By using these tools you'll be removing many of your worries by having a plan for Safety, Choice, and Focus.

3. THE SIX WARNING SIGNS OF PROCRASTINATION

A major step in your Now Habit program is to identify your procrastination patterns in order to apply the appropriate Now Habit strategies and techniques. Then, you're prepared to replace them with the effective habits of producers.

Here are six warning signs to help you quickly determine if you have significant difficulties with procrastination, goal setting, or inefficient work habits.

1. DOES LIFE FEEL LIKE A LONG SERIES OF OBLIGATIONS THAT CANNOT BE MET?

- Do you keep an impossibly long "to do" list?
- Do you constantly tell yourself "you have to?"
- Do you feel powerless with no sense of choice?
- Do you feel agitated, pressured, continually fearful of being caught procrastinating?
- Do you suffer from insomnia and have difficulty unwinding at night, on weekends, and on vacations (if, in fact, you take vacations)?

2. ARE YOU UNREALISTIC ABOUT TIME?

- Do you talk about starting on projects in vague terms such as: I'll do it "sometime next week" or "in the fall?"
- Do you lose track of how you spend your time and feel that you haven't accomplished anything?
- Do you have an empty schedule without a clear sense of commitments, plans, and deadlines?
- Do you arrive at meetings and dinners chronically late?
- Do you fail to take into account the actual time it takes to drive across town during rush hour?

3. ARE YOU VAGUE ABOUT YOUR GOALS AND VALUES?

- Do you find it difficult to stay committed to any one person or project?
- Do you have difficulty knowing what you really want for yourself, but are clear about what you should want?
- Do you get easily distracted by another plan which seems to be free of problems and obstacles?
- Do you lack the ability to distinguish between what's the most important use of your time and what's just keeping busy?

4. ARE YOU UNFULFILLED, FRUSTRATED, DEPRESSED?

- Do you have life goals that you've never completed or even attempted?
- Do you fear always being a procrastinator?
- Do you find that you're never satisfied with what you accomplish?
- Do you continually wonder "Why did I do that?" "What's wrong with me?"
- Do you feel deprived—always working or feeling guilty about not working?

5. ARE YOU INDECISIVE AND AFRAID OF MAKING A MISTAKE?

- Do you delay completing projects because you try to make them perfect?
- Do you fear taking responsibility for decisions because you're afraid of being blamed if some thing goes wrong?
- Do you demand perfection in your work?
- Do you expect to be above mistakes and criticism?
- Do you worry endlessly about "what if?"

6. DO YOU HAVE LOW SELF-ESTEEM AND LACK OF ASSERTIVENESS?

- Do you blame outside events for your failures because you're afraid to admit to any deficiencies?
- Do you believe "I am what I do?" or "My worth as a person is determined by my net worth?"
- Do you feel unable to control your life?
- Do you allow others and external events to determine how you'll feel about yourself?
- Do you fear being judged and found wanting?

If you're struggling on a daily basis with most of these issues, the chances are you already know that you have real problems with procrastination. If you see only a few of these warning signs in yourself you may be procrastinating in some areas of your life while remaining in control in other areas. As you become aware of the times you feel most vulnerable to procrastination, you can be ready with your Guilt-Free Play program to keep you on the track to Quality Work and goal achievement.

For Life/ Executive Coaching or Seminars on issues of procrastination, optimal performance and productivity, contact Dr. Fiore at:

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4. THE LANGUAGE OF PRODUCERS

"There is no stress when make yourself safe and focused in the present."—Neil Fiore, The Now Habit

The Language of Procrastinators/ Workaholics:

"I have to finish something big and important, do it perfectly, and suffer and have no time to play."

The Language of Producers and Peak Performers:

"I CHOOSE TO START ON ONE SMALL STEP, DO IT HUMANLY, WITH PLENTY OF TIME FOR GUILT-FREE PLAY."

Practice shifting from the language of procrastinators to the language of producers.

Whenever you hear yourself say, "I have to finish." replace it with "I choose to start."

PROCRASTINATORS

I HAVE TO

/

FINISH

/

BIG

/

PERFECTLY

/

SUFFER

/

PRODUCERS

I CHOOSE TO

START

SMALL

HUMANLY

GUILT-FREE PLAY

FRAN'S STEP ONE

HOURS	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
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9-10							
10-11							
11-12							
12-1							
1-2							
2-3							
3-4							
4-5							
5-6							
WORK							
SUBTOTAL							
TOTAL							

THE FOCUSING EXERCISE

DR. NEIL FIORE

"New research is leading to the conclusion that these instances of ...[being fully absorbed in a challenging task] are, in effect, altered states in which the mind functions at its peak, time is often distorted and a sense of happiness seems to pervade the moment."

—Daniel Goleman, New York Times

Regardless of how you feel, within 2 minutes you will be focused, curious, motivated, and creative. And, most important of all, you will have started—and be on your way to finishing.

This exercise can be read or recorded by you until you know it by heart. You will learn to associate sitting at your desk or work station with automatically doing this exercise. Use it each time you begin work and it will lead you quickly beyond pressure messages and worry about failure and into the Flow State. This focusing exercise also serves as a good example of the reassuring, present-focused self-talk of the producer.

Start by sitting upright in your chair with your feet flat on the floor, with your hands on your thighs. Focus your attention on your breathing. If you've been stressed you may discover that your breathing is constricted. Breathe deeply, holding your breath for a moment, and then exhale slowly and completely. Do this three times, counting each time you exhale. With each exhalation imagine that you are letting go of any remaining tension and that you are deciding to drift to a different level of mind.

Now focus your attention on the feeling of the chair backing you up and supporting you. As you exhale, float down into the chair. Let it support you, as you release any unnecessary muscle tension. You can now let go of those muscles. Shift your attention to the floor, and let it support your feet. Now let go of those muscles. As you let go, continue to exhale away any remaining tension. You can just let go and allow your body to give you the gift of relaxation and support.

During the next few moments, there is nothing much for your conscious mind to do except to be curious and just allow your subconscious mind to provide your body with deeper and deeper relaxation with each phrase.

Now, notice how heavy your eyelids are beginning to feel. And as you experience them getting heavier and heavier, allow them to float softly closed over your eyes. Or you can try to keep them open, and find that it takes so much effort to try that it's much more comfortable to allow them to float down of their own accord. As your eyes close, allow relaxation to flow down over your entire body.

LETTING GO OF THE PAST

With your next 3 slow deep breaths tell yourself to let go of all thoughts and images about work from the past. Let go of what you've just been doing—driving in heavy traffic, making a telephone call, cleaning the house. Let go of thoughts about what you've been telling yourself you should've or shouldn't have done. You may even want to let go of your old self-image—your former sense of identity and its limitations on your potential.

LETTING GO OF THE FUTURE

And with your next 3 slow, deep breaths, let go of what you anticipate happening in the "future"—a constructed concept of a time that really doesn't exist. Let go of all thoughts and images of future work and deadlines—freeing more energy for focusing in the present.

CENTERING IN THE PRESENT

With your next 3 slow, deep breaths, notice—just notice—that it really doesn't take much energy to just be in the present. Let go of trying to be in any particular time, and let go of striving to be any particular way. Just allow yourself to notice the sensations of being where you are now. Choose to be in this situation allowing the wisdom of your body and inner mind to provide you with the just right level of energy and relaxation to be here, doing whatever you choose to do in this moment.

You can now find yourself at a deeper level of relaxation where you can give yourself any positive suggestion you wish. With your next 3 slow, deep breaths you can begin to link the power of the right and left hemispheres of your brain, accessing the Flow State under your conscious control.

To use the focusing exercise for overcoming procrastination and to stimulate interest in the process of starting to work, count up from 1 to 3, and say to yourself:

"With each breath I become more alert, curious, and interested in how rapidly I'll be going beyond discomfort and worry to starting with purpose and commitment in just a few seconds of clock time—1. Becoming more and more alert and ready to begin as I tap into the inner wisdom of my mind and many alternative solutions—2. Coming all the way up to full alertness, operating at a genius level with the support of my entire brain and my creative faculty, ready and eager to begin—3."

THE RELAXING EXERCISE

DR. NEIL FIORE

This exercise can be read into a tape recorder and used on a daily basis to practice speaking in a language your body can cooperate with to bring you relaxation and stillness of mind. The exercise takes twelve to fifteen minutes and is good preparation for the one-to-two-minute focusing exercise.

This exercise is directed toward the warming of your hands: that is, you will be able to dilate your blood vessels and the tiny capillaries of your hands and fingers. You cannot achieve this by commanding it to happen, the way you might command your hand to open. You can only do this by letting go of central nervous system control and allowing your automatic nervous system to cooperate.

This is your exercise. You will be in control at all times. If you wish to open your eyes or shift your position, you can do so. There is no right or wrong way to achieve relaxation, just your way, at whatever rate and to whatever depth is just right for you.

You can start by sitting erect with your feet flat on the floor and with your hands in your lap. Allow your eyelids to float softly closed over your eyes as you turn your attention inward, toward your breathing. Now breathe deeply, hold your breath for a moment, and then exhale slowly and completely. Do this three times, letting your exhalation be a signal that you are getting rid of any remaining tension. You can now notice the chair and let it support you, floating down into it; no need for you to hold. You can let go of those muscles; and now focus on how the floor is supporting your feet, and let go of those muscles. No need for you to hold: just let go and allow your body to give you the gift of relaxation and proper support. Now, there is nothing for you to do except to allow your conscious mind to be curious and watch as your body and subconscious mind cooperate with the process of providing you deeper and deeper relaxation with each phrase.

I will state all the phrases in the first person, and you can repeat them silently to yourself in the first person. For example: I am sitting still. As you repeat each phrase, you just imagine, visualize, and feel the change happening. And then just let it happen, letting your body carry out the directions you have given it. This is called "passive volition" - by imagining, visualizing and feeling the direction given in each phrase you are stating your will in a language your body can understand. You are letting the will give direction in a passive way, without using force and without trying to make anything happen.

You quietly let the change happen, using your body's natural tendency to cooperate. And now, you can make yourself comfortable and be ready to proceed, continuing to breathe deeply and slowly, repeating quietly to yourself

I feel quiet. I am beginning to feel quite relaxed-my feet feel quiet and relaxed, my ankles, my knees, and my hips feel light, calm, and comfortable. My stomach and the entire center of my body feels light calm and comfortable.

My entire body feels quiet, calm and comfortable. I feel relaxed. My arms and my hands are quiet and warm. I feel quite quiet. My entire body is calm and my hands are warm-relaxed and warm. My hands feel warm. My hands are warm. My hands are slowly becoming warmer. I can continue to breathe deeply and slowly.

My entire body is quiet, comfortable, and calm. My mind is quiet. I withdraw myself from my surroundings and feel serene and still. My thoughts are turning inward. I feel at ease. Within myself I can visualize and experience myself as calm, comfortable, and quiet. In an easy, quiet inward-turning way I am quietly alert. My mind is calm, and quiet. I feel an inward quietness.

I will continue with these thoughts for two minutes and then softly open my eyes, feeling fine, relaxed and quietly alert. The next time that I speak, two minutes of clock time will have gone by, and it will be interesting to note how deeply relaxed I can get in a time that is normally so short.

(Allow two minutes to pass.)

Well, fine, and did that feel like two minutes to you? Do you feel as if you've had a nice nap? Want to stretch and discover if your hands are warmer and more relaxed? Now take three slow, deep breaths and with each breath become more quietly alert; adequately alert; ready to begin on some project or task in a very relaxed and focused way.

THE CENTERING EXERCISE

DR. NEIL FIORE

Centering is a one-minute, twelve-breath exercise that transitions your mind from fretting about the past and future to being focused in the present—where your body must be. Centering in the present clears your mind of regrets about the past and worries about anticipated problems in the so-called future.

As you withdraw your thoughts from these imagined times and problems, you release yourself from guilt about the past and worry about the future. You experience a stress-free vacation in the present. Whenever you experience moments of the joyful abandon in play, the easy flow of creativity, or a state of concentration that leads to effortless optimal performance, you are practicing a form of “centering.” Use this exercise each time you start a project. Within just a week or two your body and mind will learn to naturally let go of tension and focus on working efficiently and optimally.

Read the following to yourself or tape record it and play it each time you start a project.

1. Begin by taking three slow breaths, in three parts: #1 Inhale, #2 Hold your breath and muscle tension, and, #3 Exhale slowly, floating down into the chair. With each exhalation - let go of the last telephone call or commute and float down into the chair. With your next exhalation, let the chair hold you and let go of any unnecessary muscle tension. Let go of all thoughts and images about work from the past. Clear your mind and your body of all concerns about what “should have” or “shouldn't have” happened in the past. Let go of old burdens. Let go of trying to fix your old problems. Take a vacation from trying to fix other people. Let each exhalation become a signal to just let go of the past.

Say to yourself as you exhale: “I release my mind and body from the past.”

2. With your next three breaths, let go of all images and thoughts about what you think may happen in the future—all the “what ifs.” With each exhalation clear your muscles, your heart, and your mind of the work of trying to control the so-called future.

Say to yourself as you exhale: “I release my mind and body from the future.”

3. With your next three breaths, say: “I'm choosing to be in this present moment, in front of this work.” I let go of trying to control any other time or striving to be any particular way. I notice how little effort it takes to simply breathe comfortably and accept the just right level of energy to focus on this moment and this task—in the only moment there is, now.

Say to yourself as you exhale: “I bring my mind into the present.”

4. For the next few minutes, there is nothing much for my conscious mind to worry about within this sanctuary. You are safe from the past and the future. I just allow the natural processes of my mind and body to provide me with focused concentration. I access my inner genius and its creative resources.

Say to yourself as you exhale: “I am centered within my larger, wiser, stronger Self.”

5. With your next three breaths count up from 1 to 3: One, becoming more adequately alert with each breath; Two, curious and interested about going rapidly from not-knowing to knowing; and, Three, eager to begin, curious and interested about how much I will accomplish in such a short period of time.

*Adapted from Dr. Fiore's latest book: *Awaken Your Strongest Self: Break Free of Stress, Inner Conflict, and Self-Sabotage* [McGraw-Hill, 2006]

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AUTOGENIC EXERCISE *

Autogenics is a method of controlling or influencing bodily functions, such as blood flow to warm your hands, by using a language that your body can cooperate with.

Through autogenics, you learn to use “passive volition” to communicate in words and images that produce relaxation, recovery from fatigue, and improved circulation.

In this first stage of gaining physical control through relaxation, you can achieve satisfactory levels of relaxation with increasingly beneficial results within a week or two of daily practice for 10 15 minutes. It's important that you resist the urge to test out your new skills against the most stressful events in your life until you have practiced and achieved a satisfactory level of relaxation.

“Autogenic” means “self control of your body.” This particular exercise is directed toward warming your hands and relaxing your entire body. You can only achieve this by letting go of conscious attempts at control, and by allowing the automatic part of your nervous system to do its job.

In doing this exercise, you will be accomplishing the amazing feat of dilating the blood vessels and capillaries in your hands and fingers. You cannot accomplish this by commanding it to happen, the way you might if you wanted to open your hand. It can only be accomplished by learning to speak in a language that your unconscious mind understands, and by trusting in your inner wisdom to bring you deep relaxation and rapid recuperation for your own health and benefit.

Start by sitting erect with your feet flat on the floor, with your hands on your thighs. Breathe deeply, hold your breath for a moment, and then exhale slowly and completely. Do this three times, counting each time you exhale. Let each exhalation be a signal that you are letting go of any remaining tension.

[When you tape record this exercise include the following paragraph.]

Now allow your eyelids to close softly. You can try to keep them open, and find that it's much more comfortable to allow them to float down over your eyes.

Allow the relaxation to flow down over your entire body. You now can shift your attention on the chair. Let yourself float down into the chair. Let it support you. Let go of any unnecessary holding in those muscles. Shift your attention to the floor, and let it support your feet. Now you can let go of those muscles. As you let go, continue to exhale away any remaining tension.

During these next few minutes, there's nothing much for you to do except to allow your conscious mind to be curious as your body and unconscious mind cooperate with the process of providing you deeper and deeper relaxation with each phrase.

As you repeat each phrase, just imagine, visualize, and feel the change happening. By imagining, visualizing, and feeling the direction given in each phrase, you are stating your will in a language your body can understand. You're offering your body direction in a passive way, without using force and without trying to make anything happen.

Quietly let the change happen, using your body's natural tendency to cooperate. Now, you can be comfortable. Continue to breathe deeply and slowly and repeat quietly to yourself the following:

- I feel quiet. I am beginning to feel quite relaxed my feet feel quiet and relaxed. My ankles, my knees, and my hips feel light, calm, and comfortable. My stomach and the entire center of my body feel light, calm, and comfortable.
- My entire body feels quiet, calm, and comfortable. My arms and my hands feel quiet and warm. My entire body feels quiet and warm. I feel calm and relaxed. My hands feel calm, relaxed, and warm. My hands are relaxed. My hands are warm. My hands are slowly becoming warmer and warmer as I continue to breathe deeply and slowly.
- My entire body is quiet, calm, and comfortable. My mind is quiet. I withdraw myself from my surroundings and feel serene and still. My thoughts are turning inward. I feel at ease. Within myself I can visualize and experience myself as quiet, calm, and comfortable. In an easy, quiet, inward turned way, I am quietly alert. My mind is calm and quiet. I feel an inward quietness.
- I will continue with these thoughts for two minutes and then softly open my eyes feeling fine, relaxed, quietly alert, and better than before. It will be interesting to discover how deeply relaxed I can become in a time that normally would seem so short. But even a few minutes of clock time can be all the time in the world for the unconscious mind to dream, to problem-solve, and to achieve deep relaxation and recuperation.

You can feel adequately alert and completely relaxed, comfortable, and better than before.

* excerpted from Dr. Fiore's "Talking to Your Body—Performance Under Pressure" tape #150. Available at: www.neilfiore.com.