

Transcript | Reclaiming Your Focus When Everything is Urgent

WEBVTT

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00:00:09.910 --> 00:00:23.890

Alicia Fuller: Hello, and welcome to this masterclass on reclaiming your focus when everything is urgent. My name is Alicia, and I am the UK Government Partnerships Lead here at Apolitical.

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00:00:24.150 --> 00:00:34.289

Alicia Fuller: It would be great to hear from all of you, so do post in the chat where you're joining us from, and what organization you work for, so please do post away in the chat.

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00:00:34.800 --> 00:00:42.010

Alicia Fuller: Today, we're going to be talking about how to find clarity and control in the midst of constant demands and shifting deadlines.

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00:00:42.220 --> 00:00:47.219

Alicia Fuller: Sadly, I think it's something we're all too familiar with, especially for public servants.

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00:00:47.830 --> 00:00:55.780

Alicia Fuller: We'll share strategies and mindsets to help you manage your attention, even when everything feels like a priority.

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00:00:55.810 --> 00:01:07.860

Alicia Fuller: You'll hear from a strategic communications leader who has guided government and global organizations on what it really takes to stay focused in fast-moving, high-pressured environments.

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00:01:08.180 --> 00:01:13.259

Alicia Fuller: So, let me just have a quick look in the chat, see who we've got in the room.

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00:01:14.140 --> 00:01:21.309

Alicia Fuller: Bristol, from Alberta, Canada, hello, hello. Glamorgan, Leeds.

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00:01:21.690 --> 00:01:30.750

Alicia Fuller: Hello, welcome, people from California. Wow, we've got a real range of time zones here, that's so exciting. Dorset.

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00:01:31.540 --> 00:01:38.569

Alicia Fuller: Brilliant. Worcester, Scotland. Okay, lots of people joining, from all over the world today.

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00:01:39.290 --> 00:01:53.240

Alicia Fuller: For those of you who may be joining us for the first time, welcome! APolitical is the world's largest network for global government, used by over a quarter of a million public servants and policy makers from more than 170 countries.

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00:01:53.740 --> 00:02:03.230

Alicia Fuller: Our mission is to make governments smarter, and we do this by equipping public servants worldwide with the knowledge and skills they need to lead the change.

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00:02:03.710 --> 00:02:09.450

Alicia Fuller: So, hello, welcome, if you're just joining us. Okay, we have... we now have Jamaica, we have the Bahamas.

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00:02:09.660 --> 00:02:19.830

Alicia Fuller: It's getting... it's getting heated over there. Fantastic. Brighton, okay, Jess, something familiar for you there. Fantastic, okay, great.

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00:02:21.210 --> 00:02:37.009

Alicia Fuller: And a special welcome to those of you who are already members of APolitical's Life in Government community. If you're not a member, we're thrilled to extend an invite today to connect with today's speaker and your peers across the global public service.

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00:02:37.350 --> 00:02:54.270

Alicia Fuller: This is really a space for you to share questions, ideas, success stories, and practical advice about all aspects of life in government. You'll see up on your screen here that you can join via a QR code, and my colleague will also post the link for you in the chat.

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00:02:54.500 --> 00:03:02.710

Alicia Fuller: We are going to be continuing the conversations started at today's event in this community, so please do click through, say hi, introduce yourself.

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00:03:04.000 --> 00:03:09.320

Alicia Fuller: So I'm just gonna get a few technical notes out of the way before we get into today's discussion.

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00:03:09.490 --> 00:03:26.989

Alicia Fuller: This event is recorded for on-demand viewing on the apolitical website, so please don't record it yourself. Contact details for privacy concerns are in the apolitical homepage footer. Closed captions are available and can be toggled on or off in your screen settings.

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00:03:27.420 --> 00:03:42.860

Alicia Fuller: Okay, now onto the fun stuff. So, before we introduce our speaker, we'll run a few quick polls, just to gauge your perspectives on today's conversation. So, let's have a look at the first poll.

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00:03:44.220 --> 00:03:48.020

Alicia Fuller: What's your biggest focus challenge at work?

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00:03:49.220 --> 00:03:50.250

Alicia Fuller: So...

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00:03:50.400 --> 00:04:01.680

Alicia Fuller: What's your biggest focus challenge at work? Too many meetings or calls? I think we're all too familiar with that. Constant interruptions and last-minute requests? Juggling too many tasks or priorities.

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00:04:02.060 --> 00:04:15.610

Alicia Fuller: Email overload, messaging overload, mental fatigue and burnout, which is, of course, quite a kind of serious consequence there, lack of clear goals or direction, or perhaps it's something else, so please do, share that in the chat.

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00:04:17.589 --> 00:04:21.149

Alicia Fuller: Great, it's lots of responses coming in here.

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00:04:21.470 --> 00:04:36.409

Alicia Fuller: what have we got in the lead? Okay, juggling too many tasks or priorities. Yeah, absolutely, that is, a real challenge, when there are so many, different things flying your way on a kind of day-to-day basis, okay? And in a close...

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00:04:36.690 --> 00:04:47.649

Alicia Fuller: Close second, okay, constant interruptions and last-minute requests. Okay, I think tech is not to help with that. When you get things flying on your phone, and you've got lots of apps open, it's... it can be a lot.

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00:04:48.110 --> 00:04:55.219

Alicia Fuller: Okay, fantastic. Now we're gonna move on to our second poll.

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00:04:55.430 --> 00:05:02.219

Alicia Fuller: So, that will come up on your screen. So, how often do you feel in control of your schedule?

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00:05:02.890 --> 00:05:19.749

Alicia Fuller: So, how often do you feel in control of your schedule? Is it almost never, i.e. my day is usually really reactive? Occasionally some structure, but interruptions win. About half the time, so it depends on the week. We know some weeks can be a lot busier than other weeks.

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00:05:19.750 --> 00:05:30.080

Alicia Fuller: Most days, I have good systems in place, almost always. I'd like to hear from you in the room if this is your response. You have a lot to teach us, I'm sure.

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00:05:30.080 --> 00:05:34.629

Alicia Fuller: Great, thank you for... for putting in these responses, okay.

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00:05:34.810 --> 00:05:52.949

Alicia Fuller: Okay, about half the time, it depends on the week, comes out, as the strongest response there. I think absolutely there can be, you know, moments where things are torpedoed through, you know, demands that may come through, ways that you weren't expecting, so that's fantastic. Thank you.

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00:05:53.840 --> 00:06:03.429

Alicia Fuller: Okay, and on to our third and final poll for today. Do you currently use any tools or apps to help with focus?

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00:06:03.680 --> 00:06:08.949

Alicia Fuller: So, do you currently use any tools or apps to help with your focus?

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00:06:10.440 --> 00:06:16.700

Alicia Fuller: And you'll see, yeah, yes, I rely on digital tools every day. Sometimes, no.

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00:06:17.220 --> 00:06:25.030

Alicia Fuller: Not sure what would work for me, and absolutely, please do let us know in the chat, which tools you're using, because it's so helpful to hear from you.

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00:06:25.260 --> 00:06:41.130

Alicia Fuller: So let's have a look at the responses here. Okay, sometimes I use a mix of tools and routines. Okay, fantastic. No, but I'd like to explore some more options. And there are lots of options out there, and I'm sure Jess will be, touching on some of those, today.

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00:06:41.720 --> 00:06:43.140

Alicia Fuller: Fantastic.

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00:06:43.330 --> 00:07:07.100

Alicia Fuller: So, thank you so much for, taking part in those polls. Now I have the pleasure of introducing our fantastic speaker. We have APolitical's very own Jessica Van Onsselin joining us today. So, hi Jess. Jess is the Director of Communications and Marketing at APolitical, where she leads insights, thought leadership, and communications.

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00:07:07.580 --> 00:07:24.460

Alicia Fuller: Prior to joining APolitical, she was the founder and managing director of Bright Guide, a strategic communications company focused on reform and international development communications. She has also served as head of public affairs for Anglo Gold, Ashanti's Africa Division.

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00:07:24.590 --> 00:07:32.749

Alicia Fuller: You can read her full bio by visiting the Resources tab at the bottom of your Zoom screen and heading to the Speakers section.

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00:07:33.820 --> 00:07:43.809

Alicia Fuller: So, Jess, hello. Before we launch into today's session, I thought we could start with a quick icebreaker question, just to get us all warmed up. So, Jess...

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00:07:43.910 --> 00:07:50.770

Alicia Fuller: I'd love to ask you, what is the most unexpected thing that's ever interrupted your focus at work?

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00:07:50.900 --> 00:07:55.610

Alicia Fuller: So, what's the most unexpected thing that's ever interrupted your focus at work?

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00:07:55.610 --> 00:08:08.500

Jessica van Onselen: I'll give you... I'll give you two. So one was earlier this year, I was in the office, and I got a phone call to tell me that my house in Brighton, for those of you who are on the call from Brighton, had flooded.

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00:08:08.670 --> 00:08:32.670

Jessica van Onselen: that definitely destroyed my flow for the day, if you'll excuse the pun. And then about a week ago, I was on a call with some colleagues in the US, and the light bulb above my head exploded, and we blew all the fuses in the house. So the call ended abruptly, the Wi-Fi went down, and it took me a while to get back online. So those are just two recent interruptions, but I'm sure everyone on the call has some amazing ones involving

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00:08:32.669 --> 00:08:38.169

Jessica van Onselen: children, or dogs, or cats, or, a combination thereof. What about you, Alicia?

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00:08:38.630 --> 00:09:02.960

Alicia Fuller: Gosh, well, I have to say, I remember getting onto a call with a client once, and they had a cardboard cutout of Britney Spears in the background, and because of the blur, it kept on tilting in and out, and I have to say, I just couldn't focus because I saw, kind of, Britney dancing in the background, but, yeah, it's always then hard to regain that focus, but that's why we're here today. Yeah, please do respond in the chat.

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00:09:02.970 --> 00:09:07.370

Alicia Fuller: Let's see if we've got anything... gosh, okay.

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00:09:08.050 --> 00:09:23.179

Alicia Fuller: Yeah, it was dramatic, Peggy. Yeah, absolutely, and that's probably about the light bulb rather than Brittany. Yeah, a parrot, oh my gosh, Sarah, please do tell us more, but yeah, please do, post in the chat, your answers to that icebreaker.

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00:09:23.710 --> 00:09:25.030

Alicia Fuller: Okay.

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00:09:25.230 --> 00:09:35.150

Alicia Fuller: Great answers, that's enough from me. So without further ado, I'm gonna hand over to Jess for the next 25 minutes. Over to you, Jess.

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00:09:35.150 --> 00:09:49.800

Jessica van Onselen: Hi everyone, fantastic. Thank you so much, Alicia, and what an absolute joy to be able to spend a bit of time with all of you today. I'm actually going to now set a timer for myself, and I will talk about why I have done that during my presentation.

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00:09:49.800 --> 00:10:01.480

Jessica van Onselen: I'd like to start today's session, with congratulating all of you on today's call. The fact is, you are here, and you're focusing, so we already have evidence that you can reclaim focus when everything else feels urgent.

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00:10:01.480 --> 00:10:03.580

Jessica van Onselen: And for this, you should all be applauded.

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00:10:03.620 --> 00:10:14.480

Jessica van Onselen: If you walk away from today with one idea, it's that focus doesn't just happen. In fact, in the world we live in, full of emails and pings and competing urgencies.

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00:10:14.480 --> 00:10:37.200

Jessica van Onselen: Focus is something you have to fight for. It's not a natural state anymore, it's an ongoing discipline to spend less time in reactive mode, not no time in reactive mode, just

less time in reactive mode, and more in proactive mode. And like any discipline, it requires both design and practice, and I will be practicing this for the rest of my life, as you will as well, I'm sure.

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00:10:37.300 --> 00:10:51.289

Jessica van Onselen: I think of it like a muscle. I mean, if you train it, you actively manage it, it gets stronger, and if you neglect it, your focus can really be lost. The world can dictate your attention, and it can atrophy a bit. And this matters especially in government and public services.

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00:10:51.290 --> 00:11:07.700

Jessica van Onselen: Because unlike in most jobs, your work as public servants, it's not just about, like, efficiency for profit. It's about citizens, it's about policy, it's about decisions that ripple through society. And these decisions deserve the very best of your attention, as public servants.

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00:11:07.700 --> 00:11:30.270

Jessica van Onselen: So today, I want to walk through some of the ways you can reclaim that muscle of focus, some practical and evidence-based strategies that help you to stay present, to prioritize wisely, and to try and build environments where your attention serves these matters most. I'm going to ask my colleague Julia to share some slides that I've prepared. I'm not driving the slides, so Julia, I'm just going to say next when we need to...

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00:11:30.380 --> 00:11:32.709

Jessica van Onselen: Let's head on to the next one. Alright.

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00:11:32.890 --> 00:11:42.660

Jessica van Onselen: You wake up, your to-do list is a mile long, your WhatsApps are exploding, your Teams line is already ringing over breakfast. Step one, if you're like me, is to panic.

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00:11:43.150 --> 00:11:59.909

Jessica van Onselen: The secret to panic is just to panic the right amount. When everything feels urgent, that first surge of panic is natural. In fact, a little bit of panic can actually be quite useful, and I'll tell you why I say that. Because it prompts us to verbalize.

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00:11:59.910 --> 00:12:05.480

Jessica van Onselen: To say out loud to a colleague, or your boss, or mostly even to oneself.

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00:12:05.540 --> 00:12:09.670

Jessica van Onselen: I kind of have too much going on, and here is what's on my plate.

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00:12:10.460 --> 00:12:28.319

Jessica van Onselen: Neuroscience tells us that putting feelings into words activates the prefrontal cortex, the brain's center for regulation and decision making. It helps calm the emotional response, and it makes priorities clearer. So, I don't think panic is something to suppress, it's a signal to stop.

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00:12:28.370 --> 00:12:31.630

Jessica van Onselen: To verbalize and surface what matters most.

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00:12:31.630 --> 00:12:49.820

Jessica van Onselen: Studies on cognitive offloading show that the act of expressing or externalizing reduces that cognitive load and restores a little bit of perspective. So, I kind of think panic is your body's way of saying, pay attention, use it to regulate yourself, and set the stage for focus. So, a little bit of panic.

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Jessica van Onselen: absolutely fine. Next slide, please, Julia.

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00:12:54.390 --> 00:13:12.619

Jessica van Onselen: So here we have a picture... back one, there we go. Here we are, we have a picture of an axe. There's a saying that was often attributed to Abraham Lincoln, although the internet tells me that it isn't actually verified, that he said it, but the quote was, if I had 6 hours to cut down a tree, I'd spend the first 5 sharpening the axe.

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00:13:12.800 --> 00:13:31.700

Jessica van Onselen: And this is really about stepping out of reactive mode, even for 10 minutes, and spending a moment in proactive mode. The point here is agency. Even when you're overwhelmed, you can still reclaim control over the next day, the next week, but sometimes even the next hour, just by stepping back.

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00:13:31.880 --> 00:13:50.249

Jessica van Onselen: Neuroscience studies show that short, reflective pauses help engage executive function, the part of the brain that sets goals and organizes actions, and those of you on the call with ADHD will be thinking about executive function a lot in your day-to-day lives. But without those moments, we just get swept into reactivity.

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00:13:50.530 --> 00:14:09.089

Jessica van Onselen: So sharpening the axe can mean just taking 10 minutes in the morning to decide, what is my most important task today, and why? It's that reclamation of agency in the face of urgency. You're not at the mercy of the chaos, you are the one choosing where the first swing lands as much as possible.

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00:14:09.580 --> 00:14:10.920

Jessica van Onselen: Next slide.

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00:14:11.820 --> 00:14:18.790

Jessica van Onselen: Write it down. So, I don't think this is going to come as a surprise to any of you on this call, but this is a really old-school tip.

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00:14:18.820 --> 00:14:35.320

Jessica van Onselen: It's just that the next tool is write it down. Don't leave tasks swirling in your head. Our working memory is actually super tiny, like, we can hold 4 or 5 items at most, and so when it overflows, you feel really overwhelmed, and lots of research confirms this.

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00:14:35.330 --> 00:14:51.279

Jessica van Onselen: So the idea of just sitting down for a second and downloading everything you're holding into your head on a piece of paper, even if you just take 10 minutes to do it, that really helps to introduce a bit of structure and discipline to what's, you know, what you're walking around holding in your head.

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00:14:51.670 --> 00:15:07.020

Jessica van Onselen: There is also something to be said for doing it by hand. So, this is quite a controversial topic, I would love to hear what everyone on the call thinks about it. They're folks who like to do all of this sort of writing down, this downloading into digital apps, and there are many, many tools which are wonderful at this.

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00:15:07.040 --> 00:15:15.970

Jessica van Onselen: And then there are folks that like to do it old school, in a notebook with pen, sometimes with paper, some people write in pencil, you can write on a desk organizer.

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Jessica van Onselen: I will just say that there is some evidence that the mind-hand connection, which is that actual graphic act of writing, does seem to indicate slightly better retention rates if you physically write things down. So if you're one of those people.

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Jessica van Onselen: Science would suggest that you have a little bit of the edge, but I live with people, and I know many, many colleagues who prefer to work in digital apps.

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00:15:35.470 --> 00:15:39.519

Jessica van Onselen: The purpose is simply about just downloading everything you need to do.

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00:15:39.660 --> 00:15:51.739

Jessica van Onselen: I'll talk a little bit about my day here. I actually spent 45 minutes at the start of every day just downloading everything I need to do. There's no doing, there is simply downloading everything I need to do.

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00:15:51.740 --> 00:16:05.230

Jessica van Onselen: But whether you have 3 minutes to do it, or 45 minutes to do it, that act of putting it down can really transform that sort of fog of urgency into a slightly more visible landscape that you can sort.

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00:16:05.230 --> 00:16:16.339

Jessica van Onselen: So, when in doubt, grab a pen, get it out of your head onto the paper, or your digital app, and you'll see what really needs doing. If you skip to the next slide, I've captured a couple of the tools

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00:16:16.340 --> 00:16:22.719

Jessica van Onselen: that I use for downloading, or some of my colleagues or friends or associates have recommended here, so the good old-fashioned notebook.

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00:16:22.720 --> 00:16:36.400

Jessica van Onselen: Many of you might use physical desktop organizers. There are many, many Notes apps, lots of Microsoft OneNote fans, Evernote is very popular, Apple Notes, Todoist, you please add some of them into yours as well.

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00:16:36.400 --> 00:16:48.640

Jessica van Onselen: I had colleagues, when I was talking to them about this who said that they just use post-it notes, sometimes color-coded to, like, write down all their tasks. Absolutely old-school works. They are digital equivalents, like Trello.

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00:16:48.640 --> 00:16:56.719

Jessica van Onselen: And of course, for the real masters among us, there are... there's task management software like Asana, or Monday, or there are many available out there.

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00:16:56.980 --> 00:16:59.310

Jessica van Onselen: Okay, next slide, please.

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00:16:59.710 --> 00:17:12.200

Jessica van Onselen: Now we come to triage. So for those of you in the UK, you might especially be familiar with the concept of triage, because if you arrive at a hospital in the UK, you will be met by a nurse who will triage what your issue is.

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00:17:12.200 --> 00:17:25.939

Jessica van Onselen: That's the process of kind of sorting through all the incoming inquiries and categorizing them, right? So once you've written everything down, the next step is triage, right? Just like in an emergency room, not everything can be treated at once.

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00:17:26.160 --> 00:17:43.189

Jessica van Onselen: So there are a couple of ways you can approach triage. Some folks like to approach it just with urgent versus important. So what's urgent, that needs to be done right now, and that's not the same as something that's important, which really needs to get done, but is maybe not as time-sensitive.

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00:17:43.260 --> 00:17:56.390

Jessica van Onselen: There's some frameworks which I'll talk about, which can really help with this, distinguishing between the urgent and the important to help you make that decision if you're feeling a bit overwhelmed. But it's about just distinguishing what's time-sensitive versus what needs to get done.

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00:17:56.600 --> 00:18:11.340

Jessica van Onselen: There are other ways of triaging. Some people like to... I mean, we all juggle multiple roles, you might have multiple projects, personal admin, your team management, things like this. Grouping your tasks by stream, and then prioritizing within each of them.

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00:18:11.340 --> 00:18:18.780

Jessica van Onselen: can help to reduce overwhelm and keep things alive. That's a system that I prefer to use. I like to group things by my different projects.

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00:18:18.780 --> 00:18:23.740

Jessica van Onselen: Managing my team, other pieces of strategic work, and then prioritizing within.

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00:18:23.740 --> 00:18:29.849

Jessica van Onselen: You'll find your own style for triage, but the point is just that if you explicitly categorize your work.

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00:18:29.850 --> 00:18:53.610

Jessica van Onselen: you are less likely to fall prey to, like, general overwhelm. By sorting these tasks, you train your brain to see priorities and the bigger picture clearly, not just reacting to whoever shouts loudest, especially over WhatsApp, etc. If we skip to the next slide, Julia, there are a couple of tools here which might be useful. So, many of you may have heard of the Eisenhower Matrix. It's a very useful way of sorting your day.

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00:18:53.720 --> 00:19:00.100

Jessica van Onselen: We use it a lot in our work. There's a 3-minute video, which I've linked to in my slides, which you'll get afterwards.

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00:19:00.100 --> 00:19:15.900

Jessica van Onselen: And you'll see on the right side, these are the quadrants that the Eisenhower matrix will sort your day into, what you need to do first, what you need to schedule, what you need to delegate, and what you just need to, like, not do. So I highly recommend the Eisenhower Matrix as a useful way.

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00:19:15.940 --> 00:19:26.719

Jessica van Onselen: batching similar tasks or projects into categories or groups, that's very useful, like, do you have things for project, for your team leads, for L&D, meeting prep, categorizing all of them?

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00:19:27.050 --> 00:19:36.290

Jessica van Onselen: A couple of my colleagues recommended the do-one-thing approach to triage, which is limiting the visible task at one time and hiding the rest of the list.

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00:19:36.290 --> 00:19:49.400

Jessica van Onselen: So that focus helps reduce overwhelm, minimize switching, and improve completion. So you just write one task on your post-it note, and you just work on that one task as the starting point. You hide all the rest.

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00:19:49.460 --> 00:19:57.969

Jessica van Onselen: These are different ways of prioritizing and sorting. I'm sure you have other suggestions as well, and I'd love to hear them. Okay, next slide, please.

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00:19:58.850 --> 00:20:05.870

Jessica van Onselen: Alright, here's one of my favorites. When it comes to focus, it's the idea that motion is lotion.

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00:20:06.160 --> 00:20:12.279

Jessica van Onselen: Movement literally changes the brain's state of focus. It literally changes your brain's state of focus.

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00:20:12.300 --> 00:20:31.930

Jessica van Onselen: Stanford researchers found that walking boosts creative thinking by up to 60%, and why is that? Because walking triggers what they call transient hyperfrontality, and that's a shift where the prefrontal cortex, it relaxes and allows more freeing associative networks to connect ideas.

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00:20:31.990 --> 00:20:50.920

Jessica van Onselen: There are other studies that show that motion helps with problem solving by increasing your cerebral blood flow and stimulating dopamine release, which I think is very important, especially for neurodiverse folks, and that helps to enhance your executive function. So that's why you often unstick a problem once you leave your desk.

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00:20:51.080 --> 00:21:03.070

Jessica van Onselen: I actually have a colleague in my team who blocks a lunchtime walk in their calendar every single day, and that consistency matters. Just, it builds up habits, and it turns walking into a daily cognitive reset.

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00:21:03.500 --> 00:21:16.070

Jessica van Onselen: The trick with walking for focus is to set an intention, and to deliberately focus on the question you're trying to puzzle through. Are you trying to write a concept note? Maybe you're trying to write a speech.

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00:21:16.110 --> 00:21:24.669

Jessica van Onselen: Think about what it is you want to cover. Try to think about the fu- trying to think about a future state, for example, or a strategy.

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00:21:24.800 --> 00:21:41.270

Jessica van Onselen: go for that walk, and make sure that you intentionally go into that walk thinking about what you're wanting to solve, what that plan or that strategy would be for tackling that particular issue. So it's really about having an intention for problem solving. I'll give you a specific tip.

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00:21:41.740 --> 00:21:52.809

Jessica van Onselen: This may work for you, it may not, but I'll tell you what I do. So, when I walk, I have an AI app installed on my phone. In my case, it's ChatGPT's mobile app.

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00:21:52.850 --> 00:22:11.329

Jessica van Onselen: which has a voice note function, not unlike WhatsApp, or Signal or Telegram. I can record voice notes into ChatGPT, in which I can download a massive stream of consciousness, just talk for 6 to 8 minutes about an issue that I'm sort of working through, some questions I might have, how might I approach this.

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00:22:11.400 --> 00:22:19.480

Jessica van Onselen: And then I can do a couple of things with that voice-to-AI voice note. I can say to, in this case, ChatGPT, but you may use another AI

118

00:22:19.670 --> 00:22:23.689

Jessica van Onselen: Structure that stream of consciousness into an email for my peers.

119

00:22:23.690 --> 00:22:42.670

Jessica van Onselen: Help me structure that stream of consciousness into a concept note for my CEO, or ask me some critical questions about this project that I'm working through. And so I will walk and kind of talk and iterate with the AI app, and I find that an incredibly productive way of using my walking time to work through certain issues.

120

00:22:43.060 --> 00:22:48.160

Jessica van Onselen: Try that if that works for you. It's not for everybody. For me, I find it incredibly useful for focus.

121

00:22:48.420 --> 00:22:56.610

Jessica van Onselen: I think just the message here is don't dismiss walking as time away from work. It's time that actually sharpens your focus if used intentionally.

122

00:22:56.610 --> 00:23:14.260

Jessica van Onselen: If you skip to the next slide, here are some of the tools that, might be helpful for a walk, you know, setting an attention, ChatGPT mobile app voice note mode, again, I'm not, hung up on ChatGPT, you may use Claude, you may use another one, just that Socratic method of asking critical questions.

123

00:23:14.260 --> 00:23:24.299

Jessica van Onselen: Some folks might want to phone a colleague, a mentor, maybe make some time with an advisor to discuss, or just talk out loud. No one will think you're nuts. It can be incredibly useful.

124

00:23:24.470 --> 00:23:26.410

Jessica van Onselen: Next slide, please.

125

00:23:27.140 --> 00:23:44.719

Jessica van Onselen: The tomato. I'm so pleased that someone in the chat has already actually mentioned this. So, this is a reference to the Pomodoro technique, Pomodoro meaning tomato in Italian. This is a focus technique where the idea is to break work into bounded sprints, typically around 25 to 50 minutes.

126

00:23:44.720 --> 00:23:47.980

Jessica van Onselen: And then follow it with the reward, which is a short break.

127

00:23:48.080 --> 00:24:00.710

Jessica van Onselen: Studies on ultradian rhythms suggest our brains really operate best in about a 90-minute cycle, so that's bursts of intense effort followed by recovery, and Pomodoro techniques tap into this natural pattern.

128

00:24:01.190 --> 00:24:09.030

Jessica van Onselen: I think what's really key here is that it's about setting a strict time limit on one task. That's why the label here is time box.

129

00:24:09.290 --> 00:24:20.410

Jessica van Onselen: You are telling your brain, you don't have to focus forever, you only have to focus for 25 minutes, or 15 minutes, or an hour, depending on what feels good for you and your brain.

130

00:24:20.430 --> 00:24:44.819

Jessica van Onselen: time boxing works by giving your brain those really clear limits. Even short bursts are powerful. I like to focus in 15-minute chunks, you will have your own different rhythm, but in 15 focused minutes, I can really produce more progress than in an unfocused hour, so that's a slot that really works for me. And there are tons of tools out there for it. There's forests, there's focus to do, there's freedom.

131

00:24:44.840 --> 00:25:03.579

Jessica van Onselen: Some of them gamify or reinforce this, if that works well for you. And for neurodiverse colleagues on this call, and I'm sure there are some of them, because focus... I myself have ADHD, time boxing is especially helpful. It really transforms the infinite into something a little bit more manageable.

132

00:25:03.580 --> 00:25:14.030

Jessica van Onselen: So, the takeaway here is don't underestimate the humble 25-minute, or in my case, the humble 15-minute burst. You can structure it, and you'll get far more done.

133

00:25:14.220 --> 00:25:27.969

Jessica van Onselen: Next slide, please. I've listed some of the tools here. There's an introduction to time boxing, which is quite useful. Some Pomodoro timers, which I use on the internet. These are free resources, you can just set a timer for yourself.

134

00:25:28.200 --> 00:25:43.640

Jessica van Onselen: make use of your phone for timers and do not disturb mode. If you're a Microsoft person, Microsoft has Focus in Windows, which can reduce distractions and digital distractions while you work. If you're an Apple person, there is Focus mode as well.

135

00:25:43.770 --> 00:25:53.699

Jessica van Onselen: A lot of people report benefits from listening to white noise while they're doing some of this work. It can also dull the literal and metaphorical noise in one's head.

136

00:25:53.870 --> 00:26:03.700

Jessica van Onselen: If possible, put your phone in another room. That can really help during, focused work sprints, and there are a bunch of other tools which really help with this as well.

137

00:26:04.180 --> 00:26:06.450

Jessica van Onselen: Let's hop onto the next slide.

138

00:26:06.610 --> 00:26:16.179

Jessica van Onselen: So that was time boxing, but now I'm going to talk about time blocking. Next slide, please, Julia. There you go.

139

00:26:16.440 --> 00:26:20.089

Jessica van Onselen: One of the most underrated tools for focus is your calendar.

140

00:26:20.520 --> 00:26:34.469

Jessica van Onselen: Many of us let our calendars be filled by others, but research shows that time blocking, which is proactively reserving time for deep work, significantly increases the likelihood of completing high-priority tasks.

141

00:26:34.610 --> 00:26:44.660

Jessica van Onselen: So there was this interesting study from MIT Sloan that found that workers using calendar blocking finished more important tasks than those relying only on to-do lists.

142

00:26:45.010 --> 00:26:57.840

Jessica van Onselen: And why is that? It's because lists don't guard your time, but calendars do. It really doesn't have to be complicated. You just make appointments with only one meeting attendee, and that meeting attendee is you.

143

00:26:58.110 --> 00:27:11.070

Jessica van Onselen: I'm a big fan of Carl Newport, the author of Deep Work, and he hosts a wonderful podcast called Deep Questions. If you aren't a fan, I really highly recommend you sign up. He thinks so much about focus and deep work.

144

00:27:11.070 --> 00:27:20.219

Jessica van Onselen: And Kel Newport argues that writing, or any cognitively demanding work won't happen unless you make time visible in your diary, in your calendar.

145

00:27:20.220 --> 00:27:26.560

Jessica van Onselen: He treats his writing, for example, as, like, fixed appointments, like doctor's appointments, not negotiable.

146

00:27:26.560 --> 00:27:39.310

Jessica van Onselen: And he... one of his quotes is, he said, a 40-hour time-blocked work week... work week, I estimate, produces the same amount of output as a 60-hour work week pursued without structure.

147

00:27:39.310 --> 00:27:49.650

Jessica van Onselen: So Carl Newport just really... he's also a lovely and gentle human being, and just great to listen to, so if you're ever looking for a friend in the focused battles, couldn't recommend Carl Newport enough.

148

00:27:50.070 --> 00:27:57.580

Jessica van Onselen: One of the things I like about calendar blocking is that if you don't get to a task in a day, so something else comes up.

149

00:27:57.580 --> 00:28:11.330

Jessica van Onselen: You can just keep moving that appointment to the next day, or the afternoon, and so you have some object permanence. It remains there until you've kind of dealt with it, and that really works for my brain, because it doesn't go anywhere. I can just keep moving it to the next day.

150

00:28:11.730 --> 00:28:15.490

Jessica van Onselen: Could you go to the next slide, please? I've got some tools here.

151

00:28:15.680 --> 00:28:39.790

Jessica van Onselen: So, there's a great video, some beginner's guide to time blocking, which I'll share, that's really useful. One thing you could think a bit about is day theming, so that means allocating different days of the work week to focus on different areas. Maybe Mondays you just do meeting prep for the whole week, if you have a lot of meetings. And Tuesdays you focus on project work, and Wednesdays are for writing.

152

00:28:39.790 --> 00:28:49.480

Jessica van Onselen: And Thursdays, you concentrate on evaluation. You could design that any way you like, but kind of batching different days of the week to focus on different areas can be really helpful.

153

00:28:49.480 --> 00:29:01.519

Jessica van Onselen: Try a meeting-free morning for yourself and your team. That is an incredibly good way to find consensus where the phone isn't gonna ring, the whole team can kind of work into... in... in deep focus mode.

154

00:29:01.830 --> 00:29:13.020

Jessica van Onselen: recommending, really, Carl Newport's book, Deep Work, if you're not a reading person, then his Deep Questions podcast is accessible and lovely and consistently interesting. Can't recommend it enough.

155

00:29:13.330 --> 00:29:29.479

Jessica van Onselen: All right, we're getting towards the end here, so let's go to the next slide. I was trying to find an image that indicates disappointment, and I couldn't think of one better, more perfect than, losing a perfectly good ice cream, so that's why there's a picture of an upside-down ice cream here.

156

00:29:29.610 --> 00:29:33.799

Jessica van Onselen: One of the best pieces of professional advice someone gave me is.

157

00:29:34.340 --> 00:29:38.670

Jessica van Onselen: To deliver real impact, you need to get good at disappointing people.

158

00:29:38.840 --> 00:29:43.169

Jessica van Onselen: And in part, reclaiming focus means learning to disappoint people.

159

00:29:43.270 --> 00:29:55.419

Jessica van Onselen: The key here is when you do the disappointing. This is not about letting people down, or becoming unreliable, becoming rigid, or unaccommodating, or just being a flaky colleague. That's...

160

00:29:55.420 --> 00:30:05.010

Jessica van Onselen: That's career and reputation-destroying disappointment. But rather, this is about using your judgment and communicating as early as possible. For example.

161

00:30:05.060 --> 00:30:18.739

Jessica van Onselen: I can't join the meeting as I have a deadline to finish X, or I'd love to be there, but I need to finish writing this business case, or if I take on that commitment, I can't deliver on X, but this other person might be well-placed to help you.

162

00:30:18.740 --> 00:30:30.059

Jessica van Onselen: It's accepting yourself as having limits, and also commitments and obligations, and communicating clearly that you won't be able to do that until you've done this work, or met that commitment.

163

00:30:30.640 --> 00:30:35.840

Jessica van Onselen: I just wanted to say that this is especially hard in government, where hierarchy is real.

164

00:30:35.910 --> 00:30:50.939

Jessica van Onselen: you can't say no to ministers, to permanent secretaries, to your director. I mean, that's reality. And often, let's be honest, it's fun or interesting work that you kind of get pulled onto, so it's not always just dreadful. I mean, sometimes it's really stimulating and rewarding.

165

00:30:51.050 --> 00:30:58.869

Jessica van Onselen: You can't always control what lands on your desk when you work in government, but you can... what you can do is control what you communicate about it.

166

00:30:59.240 --> 00:31:09.199

Jessica van Onselen: I'm also gonna go out on a limb here and say, and this is not researched, but, it's often the case that women have a harder time disappointing people than men.

167

00:31:10.420 --> 00:31:15.769

Jessica van Onselen: you can communicate trade-offs honestly to your peers and teams. For example, you could say.

168

00:31:15.960 --> 00:31:21.869

Jessica van Onselen: I've been asked by the Deputy Director to shift some priorities, so this other piece will need to move back to next week.

169

00:31:22.120 --> 00:31:39.120

Jessica van Onselen: That honesty surfaces the trade-offs instead of leaving colleagues guessing, or you feeling that you've let someone down. So disappointment doesn't mean conflict, it just means being clear, if I do this, I won't be able to do that. And the muscle here is expectation management, being firm, but respectful about limits.

170

00:31:39.250 --> 00:31:52.840

Jessica van Onselen: And in a hierarchy, you may not always control the what, but you can sometimes shape the how and the when through honest communication. So surfacing trade-offs, even if disappointing, really helps team realign, and helps you realign with your own plan.

171

00:31:53.320 --> 00:31:54.899

Jessica van Onselen: Next slide, please.

172

00:31:55.910 --> 00:32:06.709

Jessica van Onselen: Here's some tools and tips for communicating trade-offs. There's a great article called The Art of Disappointing People by Bill Benjamin, which is a good read for all leaders, and I've just finished the book, The Courage to Be Disliked.

173

00:32:06.710 --> 00:32:17.749

Jessica van Onselen: By Ichiro Kishimi, which, despite its slightly silly title, is a really fantastic book for anyone looking to think about impact and focus. I highly recommend them both.

174

00:32:17.900 --> 00:32:19.390

Jessica van Onselen: Next slide, please.

175

00:32:19.610 --> 00:32:42.729

Jessica van Onselen: All right, so we're wrapping up. To close here, focus isn't a luxury, it's a discipline, it's muscular. You have to build it by practicing reflection, by blocking time, by walking, by sorting, by saying no. The urgent will always be there, but if you let it consume you, the important work, the policies, the services, the systems that matter most for citizens might get lost.

176

00:32:42.730 --> 00:32:44.260

Jessica van Onselen: Also, your sanity.

177

00:32:44.900 --> 00:32:58.149

Jessica van Onselen: Every time you protect your focus, you strengthen your capacity. And it's not about perfection, it's just about trying this every single day. I certainly don't succeed at it every day, and I'm always learning from different people how they approach it.

178

00:32:58.150 --> 00:33:10.550

Jessica van Onselen: But it's something that I like to think of as not being passive, it's something you design, you protect, and you actively grow. And when you do, you not only get through the urgent, but you can make space for the importance.

179

00:33:10.700 --> 00:33:12.710

Jessica van Onselen: For the importance.

180

00:33:12.870 --> 00:33:35.279

Jessica van Onselen: So, let's just go to the last slide here, where I have some additional tools which I crowdsourced from folks that they felt really helped them. A lot of neurodiverse colleagues enjoy Goblin Tools. This is a really useful little site. It's a collection of small and simple tools for when things feel too big or complicated. Really recommend Goblin Tools. I use the time estimator on it myself.

181

00:33:35.470 --> 00:33:50.159

Jessica van Onselen: Here's some really short articles about protecting focus. How to Protect Your Focus Without Burning Bridges is really useful. One question to help you get more done, and then a short article which is, challenging the...

182

00:33:50.160 --> 00:34:06.580

Jessica van Onselen: there's a lot of stuff on the social media about pursuing the state of flow, which is very deep concentration, and maybe just saying that, conditions aren't always perfect for flow, and we need to try and have focus and do work anyway. So that article made me feel a little bit better, that we can't always achieve

183

00:34:06.580 --> 00:34:11.680

Jessica van Onselen: Perfect deep flow in our work, and we can work in imperfect circumstances, too.

184

00:34:11.679 --> 00:34:27.490

Jessica van Onselen: I want to make a little plug for... Apolitical has a wonderful community on it called Neurodiversity in Public Service. I'm sure all the folks on this call are not neurodivergent, but if focus is something that you find difficult, perhaps you have ADHD or ADD,

185

00:34:27.489 --> 00:34:45.549

Jessica van Onselen: this is a really supportive and amazing space to talk about tools and tips and tricks to succeed in government, where focus is maybe a little bit harder for you, as it is for me, than for other people. And then there's a great book, called Indistractable by Nia Eyal, which has lots of tips and tricks about focus as well.

186

00:34:45.550 --> 00:34:48.170

Jessica van Onselen: Next slide.

187

00:34:48.630 --> 00:35:06.780

Jessica van Onselen: That's my time bound. That just leaves me to say thank you. I'm so looking forward to your questions, and also learning from all of you. You all must be thinking about these issues all the time. What tips and tricks have worked for you? What hacks make a difference? What have you learned during your career? What works in government, and what doesn't?

188

00:35:07.000 --> 00:35:09.700

Jessica van Onselen: Thanks so much, Alicia. That's back to you.

189

00:35:10.780 --> 00:35:23.279

Alicia Fuller: Thank you so much, Jess. I think, we've taken away so much, and I have to say, we'll award first prize to whomever can come up with a great mnemonic device to remember that step-by-step, pros and

190

00:35:24.350 --> 00:35:42.570

Alicia Fuller: It's fantastic, so put your ideas into the chat. And I just want to encourage everyone to get your questions submitted. If you haven't done so already, please don't hold back, there is no such thing as a bad question, but I know we've had loads of questions and comments already, so thank you so much for that.

191

00:35:42.570 --> 00:35:52.650

Alicia Fuller: Just to ensure your question gets seen, doesn't get lost in the chat, we want to ask you to submit it in Q&A, which you should also see at the bottom of your Zoom screen.

192

00:35:52.940 --> 00:36:11.100

Alicia Fuller: And just before we dive into your questions, I want to let you know that we've also sourced a great follow-on resource to today's topic alongside Jess's resources that we think you'll find really useful. There is an article on finding focus in a noisy World by an apolitical contributor.

193

00:36:11.140 --> 00:36:30.360

Alicia Fuller: So that'll get posted in the chat. To receive your link to this article, go to the Life and Government community, sorry, that's not going to be in the chat, after this event, and leave a comment on the post pinned at the top of the page. So we'll send you the resource later this week by email. The, link to that thread will be in the chat.

194

00:36:30.360 --> 00:36:53.280

Alicia Fuller: Okay, so, on to the Q&A, and we've had so many responses, which have been fantastic. I was writing some of them down. There's a great, comment, really, at the end, which was around eating the frog first, which is doing the hard task first. That sounds like a direct French translation, we'll need to know what the origin of that is. But thank you for all of your comments. So, Jess.

195

00:36:53.460 --> 00:37:08.050

Alicia Fuller: The first question, I will come to you with was a question we had quite early on, which is really around, how to focus tasks when you have so many coming in at one time in one day. So I guess the question would be.

196

00:37:08.160 --> 00:37:21.260

Alicia Fuller: how do you manage your day when urgent new tasks keep coming in? So I guess that kind of preparation phase, so your to-do list doesn't end up being a lot longer than when you started at the beginning of the day.

197

00:37:21.880 --> 00:37:32.860

Jessica van Onselen: Yeah, so, this is such a great question, and I think in comms, it's particularly a fast-moving profession, which is lots and lots of little tasks, so I'm very sympathetic to this.

198

00:37:32.860 --> 00:37:51.539

Jessica van Onselen: So, one of the techniques I learned, and I'm by no means going to preach that I'm a guru on this, but it kind of worked for me, was I literally have a page in my notebook, which is called Incoming, and my only job is just to track incoming tasks there for triage later. And so...

199

00:37:51.540 --> 00:38:00.939

Jessica van Onselen: I have this natural rhythm where I find that Tuesdays and Thursdays in the office, which in our space are when we're all together physically, are just days in which I get crazy amounts of tasks.

200

00:38:01.000 --> 00:38:20.449

Jessica van Onselen: And so my sole job for the morning of Tuesdays is just to capture all of those tasks. And then I will have a point where I take 10 minutes at lunchtime and at the end of the day to triage those. So there'll be some that need to be done by that day, but actually, experience has taught me that fewer of them need to be done that day than I might think.

201

00:38:20.450 --> 00:38:44.339

Jessica van Onselen: So it's just about having, like, a receiving mode, but it is literally about having that box physically drawn, which is just called incoming. I'm so sorry I don't have my notebook with me, because I would actually hold it up for you. It just says incoming. And so it's, again, just about having that phased process of, like, just the literal inbox of everything that's coming in, and then creating that 10 minutes to triage it. And I've also found that that 10 minutes does sort out

202

00:38:44.390 --> 00:39:02.770

Jessica van Onselen: pretty quickly, like, what's immediately urgent. So that's... that's a tip that works for me. And another tip I have is that if you have a period which you know is, incoming tasking intense, so it might be your team meeting, it might be your meeting with your director, or, you know, you'll have different moments in the week which are intense.

203

00:39:02.770 --> 00:39:13.730

Jessica van Onselen: ensuring that you block a period after that where there are no meetings. So, if my Tuesdays are very intense, I try to keep my Wednesday mornings free to, like, just churn through those incoming tasks.

204

00:39:13.740 --> 00:39:27.349

Jessica van Onselen: But it's almost thinking in peaks and trough. If you know there's a peak, just make sure you build in a trough. It's not totally foolproof, but it's certainly helped me improve productivity. But folks on the chat will have ideas as well.

205

00:39:28.110 --> 00:39:52.760

Alicia Fuller: Thanks, Jess, that's really, really helpful. Now moving on to more around the, kind of, tools and techniques, so you listed some really great, ideas there. This is a question from Amy. So, how long would you suggest, kind of, persevering with each before deciding, actually, this isn't for me, I'm going to try something else? Like, you know, this tool isn't quite, you know, so how long do you provide

206

00:39:52.760 --> 00:39:57.489

Alicia Fuller: persevere with. Have you personally experimented with lots of different ones yourself?

207

00:39:59.930 --> 00:40:13.040

Jessica van Onselen: That's a really great question. I am probably more impatient than most, so I have a tolerance of about 3 tries, and if it doesn't stick with me, then I will get rid of it. Hopefully all of you have more

208

00:40:13.040 --> 00:40:16.609

Jessica van Onselen: Perseverance and patience. I am a terribly impatient person.

209

00:40:16.610 --> 00:40:41.150

Jessica van Onselen: So, if something doesn't work for me, like, pretty immediately, I will stop using it. And also, I will tend to default to physical things, like writing out lists, post-it notes, etc. That just works better for me. So I can't tell you what's right for your brain, but I could just liberate you and say, I think if you aren't feeling that it's adding value pretty promptly into your work life.

210

00:40:41.440 --> 00:40:47.639

Jessica van Onselen: you don't need to feel that you have to sold on unnecessarily, I don't think.

211

00:40:47.650 --> 00:40:56.860

Jessica van Onselen: I will say that with largest project management software, some folks use Trello at quite a big scale. There is Asana and Monday, which I'm not familiar with.

212

00:40:56.860 --> 00:41:08.509

Jessica van Onselen: They have said that those are slightly more complex and higher order and require more training, but do also report to me much better benefits from kind of thinking about those slightly more macro systems, so...

213

00:41:08.510 --> 00:41:16.240

Jessica van Onselen: I think I'm not a good exemplar in that case. I really do find... and Alicia, I think we have some colleagues that have really, like, mastered those

214

00:41:16.240 --> 00:41:20.519

Jessica van Onselen: next level. Again, this is about what works for you. Yeah.

215

00:41:20.810 --> 00:41:38.909

Alicia Fuller: Yeah, and actually, that's a good point. I think if you're looking to kind of collaborate with someone at the same time, then there are maybe softwares that might kind of suit that a little bit better. But just trying them out and seeing what kind of fits is always a good idea. Now, Jess, you brought up something which was around

216

00:41:39.190 --> 00:41:54.229

Alicia Fuller: communication, power of communication, and how that's important when you are learning to disappoint people, and really set those boundaries. And we've got a few questions in the chat here. Now...

217

00:41:54.640 --> 00:42:09.489

Alicia Fuller: we all typically, apart from a few people, will be working for someone more senior than them, who might want to, kind of, impose some time into their calendar or their work tracker. How do you go about, you know.

218

00:42:09.520 --> 00:42:17.890

Alicia Fuller: Managing that, and do you have any tips for that kind of environment, where perhaps you have a few directors above you, and you're just trying to manage demand there?

219

00:42:19.320 --> 00:42:25.680

Jessica van Onselen: Yeah, it's such a... it's such a tricky one. I'm going to be perhaps a little controversial here and just say that

220

00:42:25.740 --> 00:42:43.969

Jessica van Onselen: I think the reality of most workplaces is that it's in no one's interest to, disappoint your seniors, right? So, without advocating that anyone is totally bonkers and, you know, you're allowed to have a frank conversation with your bosses about your life and work-life balance and what makes you the best.

221

00:42:44.270 --> 00:42:55.260

Jessica van Onselen: Part of good planning and being a strategic thinker is to understand that bosses are always going to come to you, or seniors are going to come to you, and ask you to help solve their problems. That's partly the gig, right?

222

00:42:55.290 --> 00:43:08.080

Jessica van Onselen: And so, I think that when I talk about disappointment, I am not talking about, as I say, being an inflexible or unreliable colleague, and just saying to people who depend on you, I can't help you with this, I've got to disappoint you.

223

00:43:08.080 --> 00:43:24.709

Jessica van Onselen: It's about understanding how can I kind of structure so that I can accommodate some of these, you know, these flows of work which come in, and how can I communicate those to peers or those who work in my team, perhaps below me, so that we're all aligned that we need to have the flexibility to support on delivering these things.

224

00:43:24.710 --> 00:43:26.940

Jessica van Onselen: Because I, I think that...

225

00:43:26.940 --> 00:43:35.339

Jessica van Onselen: too often when I talk about learning to disappoint people, people are like, oh, we're just gonna say to your boss, you can't help them with that urgent deadline. I am... I am not advocating that at all.

226

00:43:35.340 --> 00:43:50.120

Jessica van Onselen: I think also, I just want to re-emphasize the point I'm saying, which is that the earlier you communicate these things, the less your disappointment will become something that kind of harms, you know, that harms you in some sort of way. It's about surfacing those trade-offs really, really early.

227

00:43:50.570 --> 00:44:03.509

Jessica van Onselen: I will give you a practical tip about when you have multiple people tasking you. One thing that will help in those situations, so if you have multiple directors, and you're servicing multiple departments, say you've got lots of things coming in.

228

00:44:03.540 --> 00:44:14.810

Jessica van Onselen: Creating some sort of written artifact which shows folks where those tasks are coming in, and making sure that that is rendered visible to everyone else can be enormously powerful.

229

00:44:14.810 --> 00:44:38.280

Jessica van Onselen: So, in communications, in a previous environment I was in, I would have... I was taking, tasks from multiple folks who didn't know about each other, and then I was getting very frustrated and cross because they didn't all know about what the other was doing. And so when I started to say, hey, this is what my day looks like, and reflected back, I'm getting 5 things from this department, 10 from that, and 15 from that, and then this makes for an unhappy Jess.

230

00:44:38.770 --> 00:44:58.070

Jessica van Onselen: everyone was much more helpful about being able to say, hey, we could move this, we could triage that. So, I think just think a little bit about visibility. Looking to find solutions, can be really helpful, but you might often find when you're taking tasks from multiple directors that they're not always aware of, like, the broader... that's something you have agency over.

231

00:44:58.070 --> 00:45:01.489

Jessica van Onselen: But I'm sure it's, it's not always that simple, is it?

232

00:45:02.240 --> 00:45:26.669

Alicia Fuller: Yeah, and I think you're totally right. I think you sometimes want to be the hero and just absorb all of the tasks, and then your task list just builds and builds and builds. And, you know, most of us are empathetic, no matter what, you know, level of seniority you are, so if you play back, you know, what you've got on your agenda, I'm sure people will be empathetic, and you can start building those boundaries, absolutely.

233

00:45:27.090 --> 00:45:40.700

Alicia Fuller: We also have a couple of people here who, also have ADHD, and can find it overwhelming to plan. I know you mentioned a few tips already, but do you have any other additional pieces of advice?

234

00:45:46.680 --> 00:45:52.309

Jessica van Onselen: I don't... I mean, a question I would want to ask my, like, fellow ADHDers is...

235

00:45:53.210 --> 00:45:56.640

Jessica van Onselen: One of the things that took me a while to come to terms with is that

236

00:45:56.640 --> 00:46:18.329

Jessica van Onselen: I thought planning always had to be done by writing long documents and sitting on my own. And when I learned that planning can actually take place verbally, and that there is voice-to-text transcription, or I could do planning, like, through drawing, or just sort of slightly more freeform things, I managed to fall in love with planning again.

237

00:46:18.330 --> 00:46:30.090

Jessica van Onselen: So I would... a question I would ask is, do you just hate planning, full stop, in ADHD? And a lot of sympathy for that. It's, you know, you don't go into comms, in my case, because you, like, love tons of planning.

238

00:46:30.090 --> 00:46:48.619

Jessica van Onselen: Or do you just hate planning in, like, a boring, neurotypical way that... sorry, not to say that all ways that neurotypical are boring, but it's a way that's boring for your

executive function-starved brain? Because I think planning in 2025 can look different for different folks, and I'm actually quite great at planning now, now that I know that I can start verbally.

239

00:46:48.680 --> 00:46:58.169

Jessica van Onselen: as a place that I'm comfortable in. So I would just ask you to maybe challenge whether you hate planning, or if you hate planning someone else's way.

240

00:46:58.730 --> 00:47:01.069

Jessica van Onselen: Only you can answer that, yeah.

241

00:47:01.070 --> 00:47:19.389

Alicia Fuller: Yeah, absolutely. And like Jess said, please do, write in the chat, kind of, you know, what your preference is. It's great to hear from you. And we've had some... we've had some great comments here around, the motion as lotion part of your, presentation, Jess.

242

00:47:19.390 --> 00:47:20.170

Jessica van Onselen: Yes.

243

00:47:20.170 --> 00:47:29.920

Alicia Fuller: I definitely think, you know, there's... it's kind of similar to the shower effect, isn't it? It kind of allows your brain to kind of enter to a state of kind of incubator mode.

244

00:47:29.920 --> 00:47:34.190

Jessica van Onselen: Are you a runner, aren't you a runner? I mean, runners must have amazing thinking time, yeah?

245

00:47:34.190 --> 00:47:51.169

Alicia Fuller: Yeah, and it kind of allows you to kind of transcend into a kind of a new state, and your brain can make some new connections. So, yeah, absolutely encourage it. And Jade actually said, does the walking trip work if it's an under-desk treadmill, rather than actually going out and having a walk?

246

00:47:51.170 --> 00:47:59.320

Jessica van Onselen: Famously, I have an under-desk treadmill, which my team finds hilarious. I will say it works

247

00:47:59.350 --> 00:48:16.189

Jessica van Onselen: better, but it is not the same as working in nature for me. But I do still find that motion is better than being at the desk, but that's a sample group of one, so if anyone else has a treadmill... but yeah, I mean, for me, it would be sitting still at a desk, under desk treadmill, or some people cycle.

248

00:48:16.190 --> 00:48:28.230

Jessica van Onselen: At their desks, and then, like, actually being outside. But, I mean, what's your experience? I don't know who asked that, but if you have a treadmill, would love to hear if it works for you as well. I think there's still benefits.

249

00:48:28.520 --> 00:48:42.280

Alicia Fuller: Yeah, absolutely. I think, Jade, you're getting your steps in, which is great, and also very brave, because I always worry I'd tumble up all over the shop. Great.

250

00:48:42.280 --> 00:48:50.799

Alicia Fuller: Thank you so much, everyone. We do have one final question here before we, move into our final section.

251

00:48:50.800 --> 00:49:04.520

Alicia Fuller: So this is really, a question about privacy. As you discuss visibility, I had a client who wanted to have full access to my calendar because she didn't know how to use Microsoft Outlook Scheduler to find mutual times.

252

00:49:04.560 --> 00:49:21.540

Alicia Fuller: sharing calendar kind of gave her access to, this is Tyra, who's asked Tyra's personal information and private information. That seems pretty intrusive, Tyra, if I may say so myself. Kind of, any thoughts on how to handle intrusive colleagues, if you would label them that?

253

00:49:22.720 --> 00:49:47.150

Jessica van Onselen: Yeah, I'm with you, Tyra. I don't think you need to share your calendar if that's not really your style. That said, my team works with totally open calendars. That took me a little bit of time to adjust to, but I learned the art of, like, the private meeting block, so you can also just say, focus time, and then you don't need to... your client doesn't need to know what that is, it's just a code for you. And you can also use color coding.

254

00:49:47.150 --> 00:50:06.660

Jessica van Onselen: or things that are just known to you, if you have someone else who's in your diary. But yeah, the move to open calendars can be a bit of a shock to the system, but I think it's just about developing systems where you know what that means, and that does indicate that you're unavailable, but maybe it doesn't show picking up kids from school, or GP appointment, etc.

255

00:50:07.100 --> 00:50:20.219

Alicia Fuller: Absolutely, and everyone's different in how much information they would want exposed, and I think just being, you know, there are so many different options, like you said, you can have a shared calendar, or you could just keep it private, so really up to you.

256

00:50:20.220 --> 00:50:21.300

Jessica van Onselen: Yeah, yeah.

257

00:50:21.300 --> 00:50:32.550

Alicia Fuller: Brilliant! Well, thank you so much, Jess. We've had some, true wisdom from you, and I'd like to ask everyone on this call just to join me in giving Jess

258

00:50:32.550 --> 00:50:57.529

Alicia Fuller: a virtual round of applause. I see lots of hearts appearing, fantastic. And most importantly, thank you to all of you, the attendees, for taking time out of your urgent, probably priority-packed days to engage with this, event. The team is going to pull up a quick poll just to find out how you felt about today, which will help us just to continuously improve our

259

00:50:57.530 --> 00:51:03.009

Alicia Fuller: content. And we really, really do appreciate your responses and feedback.

260

00:51:04.310 --> 00:51:23.459

Alicia Fuller: So, before you go, and whilst you're responding to that poll, I want to share a few more events that you can register to join us again soon. If you're not available to join live, remember that you can always register for the event in order to get sent the recording afterwards, so you can just catch up whenever suits you.

261

00:51:23.910 --> 00:51:36.160

Alicia Fuller: So we've got some great events lined up, actually. So we have, Hacks for Working with Copilot next Tuesday, if you're a Copilot user, where you'll learn to reduce stress and boost your productivity.

262

00:51:36.300 --> 00:51:55.029

Alicia Fuller: In two weeks, related to today's theme, actually protecting your energy and well-being at work. And at the end of this month, we'll be exploring, AI for email writing as part of our AI Skills Lab series, which is awesome. Check it out, it's really cool.

263

00:51:55.030 --> 00:51:58.310

Alicia Fuller: So those will all be posted in the chat for you.

264

00:51:59.080 --> 00:52:14.739

Alicia Fuller: Great, okay, that is all we have time for today. We really hope that you found this session helpful, and we want to say, again, a huge thank you to you, Jess, to everyone who's made today happen, and to all of you for taking time out of your busy days.

265

00:52:14.740 --> 00:52:20.330

Alicia Fuller: Keep an eye out for the email coming your way with today's recording and, all of the resources.

266

00:52:20.330 --> 00:52:29.809

Alicia Fuller: get into that community, say hello, and comment to receive today's follow-up resource. Have a fantastic day, everyone, and goodbye.