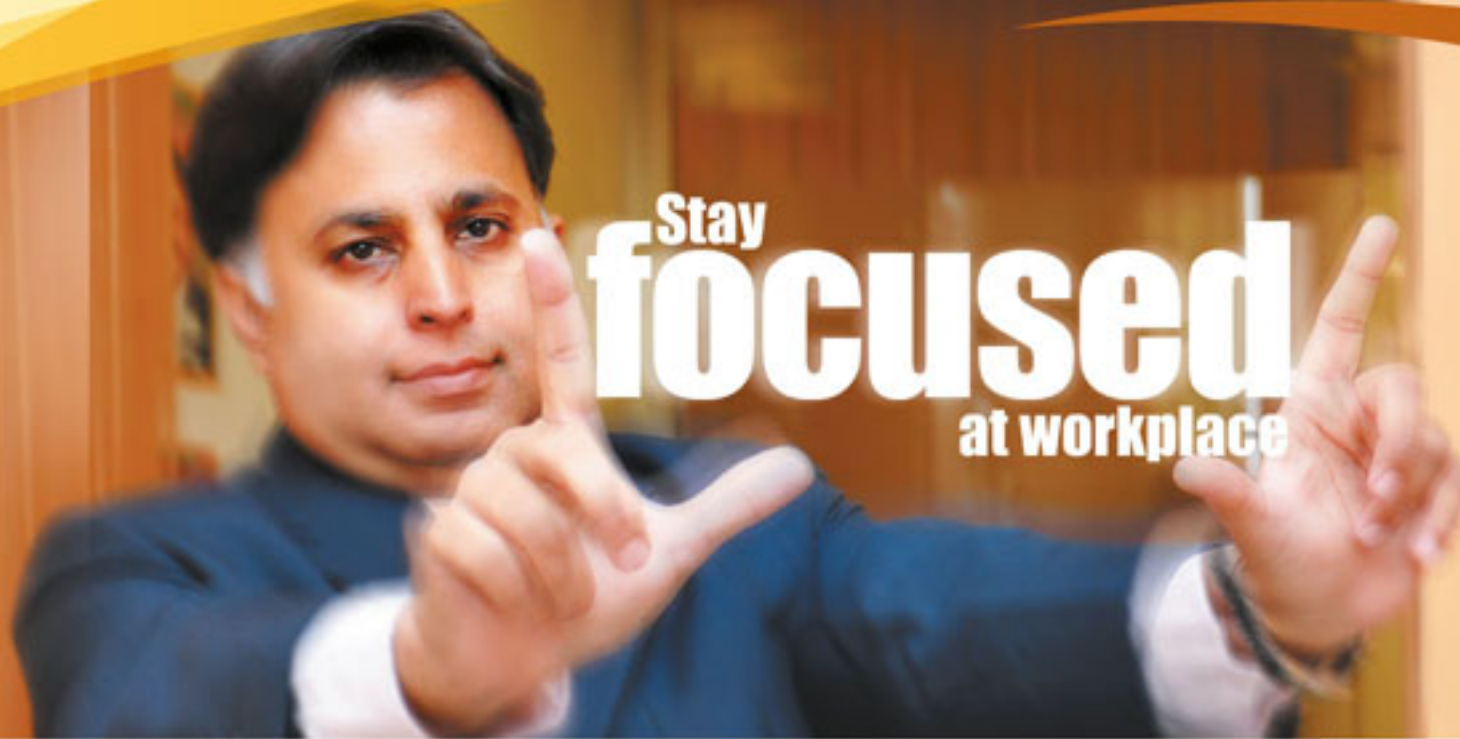


# Management Brief

Essential Tips for Personal Growth



**Staying focused** can be tough with a constant stream of employees, clients, emails, and phone calls demanding your attention. Amid the noise, understanding your brain's limitations and working around them can improve your focus and increase your productivity.

#### Editorial Panel

Moizuddin Khan  
EVP/Divisional Head, T&MDD  
Training and Organisation  
Development Group

Editor  
Asra Adnan

For suggestions and comments  
please feel free to e-mail at  
[editormbp@hotmail.com](mailto:editormbp@hotmail.com)  
Tel: 021-99225677  
FTC, 6th floor, Tower 'B',  
Shahrah-e-Faisal, Karachi

Our brains are finely attuned to distraction, so today's digital environment makes it especially hard to focus. Distractions signal that something has changed. A distraction is an alert; the brain's reaction is automatic and virtually unstoppable. While multitasking is an important skill, it also has a downside. It reduces our intelligence, and then we make mistakes. To make matters worse, distraction feels great but your brain's reward circuit lights up when you multitask, meaning that you get an emotional high when you're doing a lot at once. Ultimately, the goal is not constant focus, but a short period of distraction-free time every day. However, twenty minutes a day of deep focus could be transformative.



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# Try these **eight** tips to help you become more focused and productive:

*Many people find it hard to focus, but it is a skill you can develop. Try these suggestions for improving your focus:*

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## Set a time

Most people focus best in the morning or late at night, a study shows that 90 percent of people do their best thinking outside the office. Notice where and when you focus best, then allocate your toughest tasks for those moments.

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## Screen out distractions

Start by turning off the TV, putting down your phone and logging out of email. Not convinced? But it'll help? Try this experiment: Eliminate all this from your time for two days and see how much more you get done.

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## Light Moments

Are you a morning person? Then don't squander that time on email. Instead use it to tackle projects that require your full concentration. Low energy in the afternoon? That's the time to go through your inbox or catch up on your filing.

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## Put it out of your mind

Too many mental notes make for a cluttered mind. All that unfinished business saps your mental energy. Put whatever's on your mind on paper or capture it digitally. Think of it as off-site storage.

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## Train your brain

Any skill worth having requires practice. Learning to focus is no different. Invest time in mastering attention training or meditation — both are great ways to practice taming distractions and improving focus.

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## Build up your focus stamina

Each person may start off with a certain amount of "focus stamina" but rest assured that this is something that can be improved over time. To build your focus stamina, just give yourself a certain amount of time -- say, 30 minutes -- to do nothing but work on a certain task. When that time passes, see how long you can keep going before actually stopping, whether it's just another five minutes or another half hour.

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## Read more

Reading is a great way to build up your focus. Try reading something without stopping for just thirty minutes, and slowly build your stamina to reading for an hour or even two hours with only short breaks. Being able to focus on the material in front of you, whether you're reading a novel or a biography, will help you learn to focus on your work.

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## Anticipate your needs

If you want to be as focused and productive as possible, then you should anticipate your needs before you start studying, or your mind will start to wander if your body wants to do something other than work.



# Eyes at your goals

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## Setting Unrealistic Goals

When you're exploring possible goals, you need to unleash your imagination and ambition, put your reservations aside, and dream big dreams. However, once you've decided on a goal, make sure that it is realistic, and that you can actually achieve it in the time frame that you have set for yourself. To set realistic goals, use SMART Goal Setting strategies: make sure that your goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

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## Focusing on Too Few Areas

Many people focus solely on their work when they set goals. However, you can't neglect activities that bring you joy. Goals like writing a book, competing in an adventure race, or starting a home garden might also be incredibly important for your happiness and well-being.



**Setting goals is easy**, but working towards them, making life changes, and starting new habits is difficult. Long after the sparkle of starting something new wears off, you may still have a long way to go towards reaching that goal, or doing something every single day. It can be tough, but one of the best ways to turn ideas into goal and habits into lifestyles is to take your self-improvement public, where your friends and the world can see. Let's look at why the collective is such a powerful tool, and how you can harness it.

### Underestimating Completion Time

If you don't estimate goal completion time accurately, it can be discouraging when things take longer to achieve than you think they should. This can cause you to give up. Always pad your timelines to account for delays and setbacks. If you add extra time into your estimate, you'll feel less pressure to rush and finish by a certain date.

### Not Appreciating Failure

However, your failures are what ultimately determine your character. They also contain lessons that can change your life for the best, if you have the courage to learn from them. So don't be too upset if you fail to achieve your goals – just take note of where you went wrong and use that knowledge to reach your goals next time around.

### Setting Too Many Goals

When you start setting goals, you may see many things that you want to accomplish. So you start setting goals in all areas. The problem with this is that you have a fixed amount time and energy. If you try to focus on many different goals at once, you can't give individual goals the attention they deserve. Remember, the success of your work towards a goal rests on focusing on just a few things at a time. If you limit the number of goals you're working on, you'll have the time and energy you need to do things really well!

### Setting "Other People's Goals"

Some people – family, friends, or even your boss – may want to influence the goals you set. Perhaps they feel that they know what's best for you, or maybe they want you to take a certain path or do certain things. Clearly, it's important that you have good relationships with these people, and you need to do what your boss asks, within reason.

### Setting "Negative" Goals

Negative goals are emotionally unattractive, which makes it hard to focus on them. Reframe any negative goals so that they sound positive: you may be surprised by the difference this makes!

### Not Reviewing Progress

It takes time to accomplish goals. And sometimes it can feel that you aren't making much progress. This is why it's important to take stock of everything that you've accomplished on a regular basis. Set small sub-goals, celebrate your successes, and analyze what you need to do to keep moving forward. No matter how slow things seem, you probably are making progress!

# Health Tips

## The effects of stress

In small doses, stress is a good thing. It can energize and motivate you to deal with challenges. But prolonged or excessive stress - the kind that overwhelms your ability to cope - can take a severe psychological and physical toll. High stress levels have been linked to depression, anxiety, cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal problems, impaired immune response and cancer.

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When your job is stressful, it can feel as if it's taking over your life. To maintain perspective:

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**Get other points of view.** Talk with trusted colleagues or friends about the issues you're facing at work. They might be able to provide insights or offer suggestions for coping. Sometimes simply talking about a stressor can be a relief.

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**Take a break.** Make the most of workday breaks. Even a few minutes of personal time during a busy workday can be refreshing. Similarly, take time off when you can - whether it's a two-week vacation or an occasional long weekend.

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**Have an outlet.** To prevent burnout, set aside time for activities you enjoy - such as reading, socializing or pursuing a hobby.

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**Take care of yourself.** Be vigilant about taking care of your health. Include physical activity in your daily routine, get plenty of sleep and eat a healthy diet.

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