

EPISODE 18

[INTRODUCTION]

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ANNOUNCER: If you're struggling with your vitality, energy, mood, focus, or sleep, this podcast is for you. Your host, Dr. Ann Tsung, ER doctor, and aerospace flight surgeon, will help you reach for the stars and remove the barriers or blockades that have been holding you back from living your best life. If you've been challenged by your health, relationships, or productivity, then it's time for a breakthrough. So, here's your host, Dr. Ann Tsung.

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Ann Tsung: Hello, welcome to It's Not Rocket Science Show. I am your host, Dr. Ann Tsung. Today we'll talk about how to set up a winning routine for your work so that you can be undistractable. Have you ever tried to put in the orders in the hospital or in the ER, working in the ICU and it's taking you forever just to put in those orders because you're getting bombarded by questions from others – sign this EKG, what about this question? And what about this type of medication? The patient wants to eat, can they eat? And it takes you a long time just to put in orders for this patient or admission orders or important medication. Or perhaps you've been in meetings all morning. And when you're trying to sit down to respond to these emails, you get another email and another email. And you're thinking about the things that's going on in the meetings already, that has been ongoing nonstop. And then it's very difficult for you to focus to even complete one response to the email, all the above situations have happened to me. And so over the years, I have learned to build up through micro habits on how to really protect my time. So, I am not distracted by all these outside requests when I have something very, very important to do.

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So, in this episode, I'd like to talk about the cost of being distracted. And the action that you can take to prevent these distractions so you can be proactive, the benefits of these actions – the immediate

benefits, but the second and third order benefits. And then we'll talk about what you can do starting from today and tomorrow, some of the micro-actions that you can do. So, let's go ahead and dive in.

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So, let's discuss the cost of you being distracted. Say, in the morning, you had a presentation that you actually have to practice, or you have some sort of material or a chapter or Excel sheet, big huge database that you have to review. And you set out to do that. But at the same time, you have these notifications on while you're doing that in the morning. And then you get this email, like ding, we need this paperwork done. Due Date is actually like in a week or so. And another question, what are your thoughts about this and this and this or through the team's chat? Well, what do you think about this and this and this? It's just multiple requests at you. And then you find yourself that you can't focus on your task. Because you think about okay, I have to do this, you're like stressed out because of all these requests, I have to do this and this and this. And then and all of your task lists are building up throughout the day. And then you're like, Okay, I'm going to just pause what I'm doing and respond here really quick, it'll just be really quick. And I'll get back to what I'm doing. But actually, the cost of task switching, each task switch could cost you 20 minutes to get back into the flow. So, you go back, respond, type that email, respond to the text message, and then you go back to it, it takes you 20 minutes, again, to the flow of things again.

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There are things that you can do to quicken that pace, but typically it takes about 20 minutes, and the one or two hours that would have taken you to complete this major task that requires deep work, it could double or triple the amount of time. And sometimes you don't even finish for the day, your whole day gets derailed. And you're like, "Okay, I'm gonna have to do it tomorrow." So, the cost of task switching and being distracted is that it can actually decrease your productivity significantly, and drag out that needle forward moving task, to the next day to the next day to the next day to the next day. So really think about what is actually going to move you forward to make you more productive to actually progress in your work to create and all the other things.

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We talked about the matrix before. Is it urgent? Is it urgent and not important and often you'll see that most of them are non-urgent could be important could be not important. So, really protect your time. And what about in this scenario? In medicine? What is the cost of being distracted? Well, the cost is huge, actually. I've been in the ER and then the ICU before where I see the patient, I'm trying to place the orders on the patient in the ER especially, it's a very very distractible place. And it's very, very difficult to maintain focus when there are ambulances coming at you, multiple patients rolling in. And then there are nurses who need you to sign certain things or have a medication questions. People are calling you if you're trying to transfer a patient, or if you're trying to accept the transfer. So, there's so many things going on at you. And you're just trying to put in one order, one admission order, one bridge order one medication, and then it takes you forever, and you lose your train of thought. And sometimes the cost in like, if you don't think about the side effects of the medication you're putting in, or some of the necessary medication that the patient needs as you're putting the orders, the cost is the patient's safety, and their medical condition could go untreated, or that they could experience side effects in medications that are not actually fit for them. So, it's a way bigger cost. And it's like fundamental to really master your focus when you're working in the medical setting and not be distracted. We know that medical errors happen when people are distracted.

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So, some of the actions I want to bring up that you can take in the medical setting, it's really hard in the ER, but it depends on your work setting as well. Perhaps there is a way. Most physicians want to maintain situational awareness of what's going on around the ER and really depends on how your ER is set up, you could be set up in the ER or ICU where that physician sits right there, where all the nurses are where you can see all of the patients. And so, you can understand what's going on. Or you could be set up in a hospital, where you do have a little office. But the downside of that is that there are no windows, so you don't really know what's going on outside. I worked in the ER in residency, where we're in the middle of the ER, but it's surrounded by windows, it's an enclosed area, we can see everything that's going on, but at least like the sound is blocked off, it's difficult for patients to come up by you to ask the question. And if other people want to ask a question, they actually have to come in to the glass enclosure. So, I thought that was actually a perfect setup. But if you don't have that setup, then what you can do is, if it's something not urgent, if somebody's grabbing your attention to something not urgent, or you can set the expectation in the ER, if it's not something urgent or

emergent, have them wait until you're completing the order. So, they can see on the computer if you're putting in orders or not. So, if you're doing something very important as putting orders, have them wait until you're done to bring up any questions at you. Just bring up that awareness so that people know not to interrupt you, unless it's something, of course patient safety issue is urgent, to not interrupt you as you're doing something important.

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And a lot of times in the ER, you're being distracted by all these things, even in ICU, in the hospital. So many things are mounting up. Just think to yourself, that there's only one thing I can do at this one time, what is the most important next thing I can do and just do it, get it done. Don't let anything else derail you write down a checklist of what you have pending. And then just do that first thing, the second thing, the third thing. Writing it down will really, really help. And if there's an option to go to a place where you're the computer where there's less foot traffic, or where there's less noise where you're less distractible, if you have to write a lot of notes, if you have to do a lot of patient care on the computer, then it might be worthwhile to step away and actually finish what you have to do. Think about it. In the notes. I know it's something that physicians don't often like to do, though, it is important for patient care for the nurses, other consultants or if you're a consultant for others to know what you are thinking to write the notes to explain your rationale. And a lot of times we want to be around we want to maintain situational awareness. We don't want to miss out, just in case. But think about the cost. If you are distracted during your orders, then it's a patient safety issue. So, think about the costs. You can get your items done and a way shorter time if you're undistracted versus dragging things out for many, many hours and you come back and you find yourself that it is still not done. So, as opposed to having multiple things on your mind simultaneously and just dragging them out during the day. Just get this one thing done. without distractions go to the place where it's quiet, and then go do the next thing and go do the next thing. So, you can provide your full focus and presence to the patients, to the nurses, to the text, to other physicians for patient care. So that was a lot on patient care.

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What can you do if you're working in the office setting, say, if you have meetings going on, you have all these like chats going on, and these emails. So, what I do typically, I've talked about my morning routine before I do my most important task, actually, before the work starts, and typically from around 6:30 to 8:00. And I find that that time is the time when no one's awake, there's no one distracting you, there's no one requesting anything from you, there are no pings coming at you. And that's when I can do my self work. That's when I could get into flow, that's when I can prepare my priorities. And it's just like the golden hour for me. There's a golden hour in trauma, but in the morning time before work is like a golden hour of productivity for me. And to prevent distractions, what I do is the night before, actually, whatever I need to open up, I would have already had it opened up in my laptop to gather the material I need so I'm not going into my email to search for the materials, so I'm not going online to download something. If your item's in the cloud, I would probably have the link loaded in the cloud, log into your VPN and then all you have to do is refresh that page already so, you're not distracted by having to go to this site and this site and this site to get to that link on the cloud.

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Then, that's the night before. I will set at least three priorities. But definitely in the morning, I would tackle the hardest one, the one I don't want to do, the most time-consuming one, the one that essentially requires the [deepest] work or brainpower. I tackle that first thing in the morning. I will set a timer, the kitchen timer for about, depends, right now initially, I had to do 30 minutes, because that's how long I could focus without interruptions, without getting distracted. But lately, because I've trained for so many years, I found that I can actually maintain focus for about 60 minutes to 90 minutes and get into flow state when I listen to the Brain FM Deep Work channel and station. And then I go ahead and start work and I have no notifications on an email. It's very, very important, like no pop ups at all, even regularly, like no popups for me, and no pop ups in Teams or any sort of chat app. I close everything. I close outlook. I fiercely protect my creative time, my deep work time.

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Essentially, I try to live my workday as being proactive than reactive to other people's request. And I have set time to check my email, and I check my email twice a day, typically. And I batch them. I batch the email responses and reading to one hour, twice a day, essentially. It depends on how complicated the responses have to be. And if you limit yourself to one hour to two hours, then you'll find that you

get really, really fast at filtering out the emails that can be done now and can be done later. And you respond when you respond, you're not distracted, you're just, almost get into flow. And when you are responding and creating a response in an important email or a detailed email.

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So again, regarding meetings, what you can do, if you are in charge of the meetings, you can make sure that you end the meetings 10 minutes before the end time so that you can give your meeting participants some time to recuperate instead of because right now during the COVID times, often we find that we're jumping from meeting to meeting, it goes from 10:00 to 11:00; 11:00 to 12:00. And sometimes even goes over and because it's so easy to switch to meetings, switch rooms virtually, that a lot of times, that's what happens, you just let it run to the dot and then people have to switch to the next one. And with neuroscience with the brain, you do need time to recuperate, we can only focus for about 25 to 60 minutes, typically. And the brain needs time to pull back to relax so that the subconscious can incorporate everything that happened. And then go back again full swing for full focus at the next meeting.

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So, if you are a meeting organizer, if you want somebody to pay attention at your meeting, and to get into group flow, to be creative to contribute to have full attention and presence, it will be very helpful if you actually set the meeting time end time 10 minutes before it actually starts and stick to it. And you if you see that you're running over time, then you bring up to others. And throughout the work day, every 60 minutes to 90 minutes, get up and walk. You can do air squats. You can do push-ups if you don't have anything. I brought a kettlebell to my work and I would do 10 squats with a kettlebell and 10 kettlebell swings, and I feel so awesome even just, it makes a huge difference when you're sitting all day at your desk. And that kind of kicks up, the neurotransmitters flood your brain when you're a transmitter. So that also helps you with focus and energizes you.

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So, if you don't want to do anything that's too hard, or you have joint issues or if you have chronic pain, what you can do in between within 60 to 90 minutes, or you can go outside, take a quick walk, do walking meetings, because your brain needs to, after intense focus, it needs to relax and pull back

before you can focus again. That's just biology. Let's work with our biology. Let's scale our biology instead of working against it. We know how the brain works. Let's work with it. And if you can't do that, there's no nature or you know, places to walk around you. There's science to show that even just looking at photos or videos of nature, that can also recharge your brain temporarily. So, what I'm going to do actually, I just learned about this, I'm going to be switching my screensaver and wallpaper to something of probably in the Himalayas, where I went before, something that is awe-inspiring something that's beautiful. And when you take a break, you can just look at the video, the wallpaper, or screensaver. And sometimes that could give you a break as well, it's almost equivalent to walking in nature.

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So just to recap, think about the cost of distraction, which is decreased productivity. And when you have decreased productivity, it increases time for you to have to complete that task or that project. Sometimes, you even have to work late until six or seven o'clock, it cuts into the time with your loved ones, your family, your children. So, those are second, third order costs. And for the medical field, the cost is the patient safety issue. So, think about that as you're going through the day, your workday, and really, really make an effort and, you know, set the intention that today I'm going to minimize my distractions. Today, when I'm doing my deep work, I'm going to put my phones outside, because even visually looking at the phone could be distracting it gives you like an internal distraction, like internal discomfort when you're looking at your phone, and you just want to pick it up. If it's a work phone, you can have audio on. If it's important people will call you. And think about all the actions that you can take – taking down the notifications, doing in the morning before everything starts up, checking your email only certain time blocks of the day, and set a time constraint of how long you spend on email. And putting the phones outside like we already talked about, making sure that you get up and move every 60 to 90 minutes so that your brain can relax, rest, and refocus. If you're an organizer of the meeting or if you're not an organizer of the meeting, champion that the meeting ends in 15 minutes or 15 minutes before the end time so people can have a break. And that'll kind of quicken up the pace of the meeting as well so that people can stay focused on the task at hand. And make sure that you really take time to recover after this intense focus because it takes a lot of brainpower to do this. Relax, meditate, close your eyes, take 10 deep breaths and just focus on your breath. Those are all things that you can do in between these tasks, so that your brain will have the brain power, and the

motivation and the resistance to distraction. Because when you're tired, when you lack focus, you're more easily distracted.

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And the benefit, of course, is that you can save time, you can have perhaps like, even ten extra productivity, so that you have time to spend with your loved ones down the line, so that your patients deserve that the care that they need. And if you can think of one thing that you can do one micro-step today to remove distractions, or maybe starting tonight, write down all of your priorities, the top one priority for tomorrow morning, or even deciding to go to bed early so you can wake up early for the first task at hand. Or perhaps you can take away the distractions, turn off notifications on your phone, turn off notifications through your email so that's not popping up on the side all the time. You can just pick anything as long as it is achievable for you. It doesn't have to be a huge thing. And once you pick one thing, then once you're used to it after a few weeks, then do the other thing. And then after many, many weeks or months or years, you'll find that these micro-habits that you do have exponential effects on your well-being, on your job satisfaction. And you'll find that you have more time to do the things you love. And really, that's my motivation. I want to save time to spend with my fiance to do my self-recovery and to feel empowered to feel confident that I can get anything done. That's pushed me.

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So, thank you so much for your time with me today. I'm super, super grateful. And I hope that was helpful for you. My intention is that, you know, if you just take one thing away from today, I hope I can decrease at least one distraction for you, or help you complete one task, or help you with one patient perhaps. And remember, that everything we need is really within us now, in our heart and our mind. And there's nothing that we need to go out and seek externally to help us. So, thank you again, have a good day.

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ANNOUNCER: That's it for today's episode. Head on over to iTunes and subscribe to the show. One lucky listener every single week that posts a review on iTunes will win a chance in the grand prize drawing to win a private VIP Day for a health and life makeover with Dr. Ann Tsung, herself. Then, be

sure to head on over to itsnotrocketscienceshow.com and pick up your free gift from Dr. Tsung. Then, join us on the next episode.

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