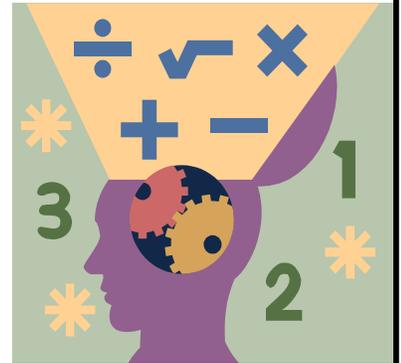


Clearing the Clutter!

By Dr. John C Maxwell

One of the common denominators of successful people is a single-minded focus that allows them to concentrate on first things first. American Philosopher and Poet Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in *The Conduct of Life*, "Concentration is the secret of strength in politics, in war, in trade, in short, in all of human affairs." While many people squander their physical and mental abilities, successful people learn how to focus, concentrate and persist.

Yet even those with a clear sense of purpose sometimes lose their focus and their ability to concentrate on priorities. Why? I've found it is usually the result of too much internal clutter. I've identified four types of clutter that I strive to keep out of my life. The benefit is that I'm much better able to concentrate on that which I do best.



Emotional Clutter-This is the relational baggage that can accumulate when we don't forgive those who have wronged us, when we hold a grudge, or when we carry a chip on our shoulder because of a grievance long past. The price of holding on to emotional clutter is too high. Not only will it steal energy from your focus, but it has serious emotional and spiritual consequences as well.

Administrative Clutter-Early on I discovered the need for a system to help me deal with multiple projects and multiple deadlines. I have at least twenty things to accomplish in the next three days, and I will be able to get them all done because I have learned to organize so I don't waste time looking around for things or wondering what comes next. There's nothing magical about my system. Find one that works for you and do it.

Calendar Clutter-This is simply mastering the basic principle of time management. You must prioritize your work and spend your best effort on that which will yield the most return. Take a few moments to start listing all the things you've done in the last twenty-four hours that gave no return whatsoever. Why did you do them? Do they need to be done at all, or can someone else better do them for you? I haven't mowed my lawn in over thirty years. Some people like working in the yard. I don't. Why would I give a couple of hours a week to something that has no payoff for me when I could give those same hours to concentrate on my priorities?

Trivia Clutter-I always lose at Trivial Pursuit because I don't commit to memory anything that I can find quickly in a book or from someone else. It's not that I have a bad memory—I just don't see the value of allowing insignificant things to detract me from my focus. Most people try to live in the path of a flood of trivial phone calls, emails and meetings. I say, get rid of the trivia.

With clutter-free living, you'll find your focus clear and your anxieties diminished. More importantly, you'll see a level of productivity that you've never experienced before. You are set free to concentrate on that which you were created to accomplish.