



## CHAPTER 1

# When It Comes to Getting Clear, First Get Quiet



The monotony and solitude of a quiet life stimulates the creative mind.

—ALBERT EINSTEIN, twentieth-century physicist

If you're not sure where you're going in life or feel like you're not going anywhere, think back to your childhood when you played hide-and-seek and concealed yourself in a bedroom closet full of clothes. Inside that dark closet, while you waited for one of your friends or siblings to discover you, you had to be quiet and not make a sound. Your eyes and ears adjusted to your surroundings—the darkness, stillness, and silence. All that was left was getting lost in your thoughts or your imagination.

So what happened in the closet as you got quiet? Your eyes adjusted to the darkness and your senses were heightened. You were quiet because you *had* to be quiet.



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## GET CLEAR

Finding time to get quiet, get focused, and get lost in our thoughts or imagination is considered a luxury to most today. We spend our days with smartphone buds in our ears, listening to calls while our thumbs rush to compose e-mails as we run between the day's meetings, which usually leave us running late for our evening's social functions or family dinner. Sound familiar?

If so, here's my number one rule for getting clear, which is to *get quiet*. When you get quiet, you get clear enough to ask yourself, "What am I pursuing and why?" This is the most important question because many of us climb to the top of ladder only to discover that we're at the wrong house.

So, when was the last time you were quiet? It's probably been a while because of the influx of technological advances in the past 15 years—smartphones, iPads, Kindles, iPods, and MP3 players. Streaming movies, TV shows, and sporting events on our tablet computers and handheld devices have changed the definition of *downtime*. It used to be that we sat in a comfy chair and curled up with a book to recharge our batteries; now even downtime is spent furiously trying to keep up with a flood of e-mails and Facebook messages while working our way through a backlog of phone calls. Every waking hour, it's constant. There's no time to catch our collective breath.

The reason we're huffing and puffing is because we're too busy, which we've somehow associated with being productive. When we tell others that we're so busy, what we're really trying to do is subtly impress others with our self-importance. Brigid Schulte, author of *Overwhelmed: Work, Love, and Play When No One Has the Time*, says, "Somewhere around the end of the twentieth century, busyness became not just a way of life but a badge of honor. And life, sociologists say, became an exhausting everydayathon."<sup>1</sup>

If you're shopping on your smartphone while you're sitting on the toilet, you're too busy.

To get quiet, you could spend an unplugged weekend in total silence at a monastery, but that isn't realistic for most. Instead, carve out small windows of time to contemplate and reflect on where you've been and where you want to be. This time can also



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serve as a reset, where you close the books on details that have been weighing on you and start anew. Next, think about these questions, knowing that your answers may change over time:

1. Who are you? What defines you?
2. What is happening inside you?
3. What drives you?
4. What are your passions?
5. What are some things you can do today to get clear?

These five questions can help you be more present and aware of what direction your life is taking. Sometimes when you get quiet, you may not like what you see. Think of a lake where the wind has whipped up the waves, and you can't see below the surface. When it's calm and quiet, you can often see all the way to bottom—or at least see the fish swimming below the surface. You might spot tires and refuse on the bottom—and may not be pleased with what you see. That's okay. This is the first step in getting clarity. It takes time and commitment to truly get quiet, and once you do, you might be shocked at what you discover about yourself. Start by taking 10 minutes for self-reflection and see what you discover.

**It Keeps Getting Faster and Faster**

Technology is accelerating so fast that we don't have time to get clear. Consider this:

- It took radio 38 years to reach 50 million listeners.
- It took television 13 years to reach 50 million viewers.
- It took the Internet four years to reach 50 million users.
- It took Facebook one year to reach 50 million users.
- And it took smartphone apps just *nine months* to reach 50 million users.

It looks like instant gratification isn't fast enough anymore.



## OUR OBSESSION WITH BUSYNESS

At what point did our obsession with busyness become a badge of honor? We seem to be consumed with cramming more in a day, in an hour, and in a minute than ever before. We thought technology would help us manage our busyness, but in reality, the opposite has transpired. The more time-saving gadgets and applications we have, the more we try to do. It seems counterintuitive, but the more time-saving technology we have, the less time we have.

Because of this—and many other things—we don't have any time to reflect or think about how we're living our lives. When we do take time to get quiet, we uncover the things in life that intrigue and inspire us, but more important, we learn to tune out some of the noise in our lives that doesn't matter. We learn to say *yes* to what is important and *no* to what is not.

Whenever I think about how busy we can get, I recall an amusing story about one of my brother's friends named Tom, who worked in the warehouse for a distribution company. He was a slight fellow who reminded everyone of Woody Allen.

Tom was eventually laid off from his job. My brother, Mark, would run into him from time to time and ask, "Hey, Tom, how are you doing?"

Tom had gone to work for a competitor, and he would say, "Oh, man, Mark. Let me tell you ... we are busy! Oh, how we are busy!"

These exchanges went on for a year or so:

*"Tom, how are you doing?"*

*"Oh, Mark, man, are we busy!"*

This went on until one time Tom said, "We're so busy that if we get any busier, they're going to have to move me to full time!"

Tom was busy all right. He was like many who've built barriers in their minds of what they can and cannot do. In Tom's mind, his definition of being busy was working part time.

Do you know people who can't stop talking about how busy they are? When you inquire *why* they're so busy, they usually respond



with something like, “Well, I have to go to the store to pick up a few things, and then I have things to do around the house. Yes, it’s going to be a very busy day,” which prompted me to come up with a great title for my next book: *When You Have Nothing to Do, It’s Hard to Get It All Done*.

If people think they have a busy day ahead, then they will have a very busy day—it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. That’s not the road you want to take to get clear.

### THE SOUND OF SILENCE

Getting quiet affords you the time to develop your instincts. Most people find they get into the most trouble both personally and professionally when their gut was telling them—screaming, even—to go in a different direction.

Instead, you plow ahead, not taking the time to think critically about your course of action. Instead of calling time-out, you keep the play clock going and rush into decisions that quickly turn south, much to your regret.

We’ve all made that same mistake. I’ve been consulting with a well-respected attorney—and a mother of two young children—who manages quite a workload because she’s a top corporate lawyer, one of the best. When I asked her about taking time to reflect, she responded, “Joe, I don’t even have time to go to the bathroom. I get up, get my kids ready, and run out the door. Everything’s a rush.”

Granted, we all have busy seasons of our lives, but no matter your schedule, workload, or obligations, try to make time to breathe, reflect, process, and plan at the beginning of the day. Even if you have only two minutes, you have to get quiet to get clear because quiet time clears the mind to perform at its optimal level.

“True silence is the rest of the mind; it is to the spirit what sleep is to the body: nourishment and refreshment,” said William Penn, the first great hero of American liberty, who lived from 1644 to 1718. A thousand years before Penn, ancient philosopher Lao Tzu said, “Silence is a source of great strength.”



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## GET CLEAR

Too few individuals tap into this source of strength or carve out quiet time during the course of their day. When asked if they incorporate quiet time into their routines, thousands of people from all walks of life, from business to education to military personnel, say the same thing: “There’s just no time.”

## HAVE AN END GOAL IN MIND

Many of us don’t have a plan for the future. Like chess players moving pawns around the board without thinking through the ramifications of bigger moves with the king and queen, we don’t have the big picture in mind because we never sit down and think about the end goal.

**Worth Repeating**

You’ve got to be very careful if you don’t know where you’re going, because you might not get there.

—Yogi Berra,  
former New York  
Yankees catcher

When it comes to getting clear, try to have a fixed goal in mind. Sure, people want to be promoted, start a business, develop the killer app, or make millions from the right investments, but when it comes to getting clear about your career and your life, you really have to identify your goal first. As New York Yankees catcher Yogi Berra famously quipped, “You’ve

got to be very careful if you don’t know where you’re going, because you might not get there.”

This six-step plan will help you on the path to getting clear.

**1. Set Concise and Realistic Goals**

Setting concise and realistic goals is difficult to do because zillions of thoughts compete for your attention every day. The National Science Foundation estimates that we have between 10,000 and 50,000 thoughts every 24 hours. More cerebral folks have a mind-boggling 60,000 thoughts a day.<sup>2</sup>

No doubt that’s a tremendous amount of dialogue and random ideas running through our heads every second, hour, and day of



our lives. There are also lots of clutter and negative thoughts—*You'll never get that done* or *You'll mess up*—muddying up our brains. Unfortunately for some people, those thoughts harden into concrete and become the story of who they are.

Don't let that happen to you. The key to identifying realistic goals is making sure they align with your overall objectives. Have you used a time of reflection to think through what you want and why you want it?

Sure, there have been times when I've regretted the decisions I've made. The direction I took led to a roadblock; other times, my best-laid plans blew up in my face. That happens to all of us, but that's how we learn—through experience.

What I often hear people say is that when they look back, they either didn't take enough time to get quiet and really listen to the small voice inside of them or they failed to set clear goals with an end in mind.

We are *kidnapped by the urgent*. We become so focused on imminent tasks and deadlines that we lose sight of the bigger picture of what we want to achieve. This is a pitfall that can affect both our personal and professional lives. It's critical to put what is important first when setting goals. Work diligently to make a daily practice of getting quiet. The clarity you will experience will be transformational.

## 2. Ask Why—Of Yourself and of Others

If you start asking yourself why you're doing the things you do—working toward a particular goal, taking a particular course of action, making certain decisions—that will help you better define your goals and values as well as help you make better decisions about where you should be focusing your time and efforts.

Many people, when setting a goal, say they want to be financially independent, which should prompt follow-up questions:

*Why is that important to you?*

Because I'd like a nice lifestyle.



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## GET CLEAR

*And why is that important to you?*

Because growing up, I didn't have any money, and I felt embarrassed and humiliated. There was a lot of pain in my family.

This is a common motivation, which is fine, but asking follow-up questions is like peeling back the layers of an onion. I remember a time when this happened with a business acquaintance who called me with a request. "Sweens, can you get me a pair of courtside seats to the Bucks game when the Miami Heat comes to town?" he asked over the phone.

I'm a member of the board of directors at the BMO Harris Bradley Center, where the Milwaukee Bucks of the National Basketball Association play their games. I don't have the pull to come up with courtside seats at the snap of my fingers, but I know where to make the right inquiries.

"Why do you want two courtside seats? They're pretty expensive," I asked this business associate.

The guy hesitated, "I have an important customer coming in."

"Really? Why do you want to take him to the game?"

"Oh, I don't know. I can impress him, show him that I'm a big guy around here."

"Why is this important to you?"

"If you really want to know, my dad died three years ago. The night before he died, I took him to a Bucks game. We had courtside seats, and I haven't been able to stop thinking about my last memory of my father."

I got it. His answer floored me, so I worked extra hard to get him his courtside seats. And he appreciated what I did for him. Asking why is a great tool to connect with people and help you get clear, not only with other people but also for yourself.

A lot of times when you ask why, people won't answer directly. Some will deflect the question, perhaps lie, or say what they think you want to hear. Keep asking questions anyway, albeit in a friendly manner, which will give you clarity about moving forward.

If you have a big enough *why*, the *how* will take care of itself. Of the six steps, this is the most important one because



continuously asking why helps ensure our decisions and actions align with the course of action we are taking.

One client I worked with had a serious drinking problem. He told me that friends had asked him to tone down his drinking, but he hadn't been able to do so.

I searched for a question that would give him a big enough why.

"Do you plan to walk your daughter down the aisle on her wedding day?" I asked.

The man's face lit up. "Of course!" he exclaimed.

"I'm afraid if you don't get some help and quit drinking, there's a good chance that you'll be dead and gone before your daughter gets married."

Shortly after our conversation, he stopped drinking. He had created a big enough why to figure out how to make a major change in his life: to be around for his daughter's wedding day.

### Food for Thought

If you have a big enough *why*, the *how* will take care of itself.

### 3. Don't Wait around for Something to Happen—Take Action

Life, it's been said, is a 24-hour white sale. You often have to act more quickly than you think. Knowing that, you don't have time to diddle-daddle.

It's like throwing your backpack over the wall first. You know what happens when you do that? That means you're all in. You're committed. Also, it's up to you to make it work.

After reading that, you may say, *I'm not ready to take that chance*.

We all fear change and the risks involved when making a bold move. The fear of the unknown and the fear of failure are enough to keep anyone from taking action. Dr. Wayne W. Dyer, author of *Wishes Fulfilled: Mastering the Art of Manifesting*, says if that's the case for you, then you need to adopt this attitude: *You cannot fail; you can only produce results. It's better to jump in with both feet and experience life than to stand on the sidelines, fearing that something might go wrong.*<sup>3</sup>

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Nothing is perfect. Things *always* go wrong. So waiting until the conditions are perfect, the stars are aligned, or the funding is 100 percent in place before you take a chance rarely happens in real life. The sooner you realize that, the sooner you will be free of the fear that something will go wrong. There will never be a perfect time. Rather than spending time waiting for the ideal opportunity, use that time to thoughtfully consider the pros and cons *during* a time of reflection.

Whether you are unsure about how to take action or know exactly how to start, complete the Winning Action Plan at the end of this chapter to assist you in getting clear. The worksheet lists five categories:

- Business
- Personal
- Family
- Health
- Financial

Carve out a block of time to think them through. After defining your goals within each of the five categories, describe why you chose them, what action steps are required to make them happen, and what you're doing to see them through. Consider the pros and cons of each area. Identify the risks, consequences, and work involved in reaching the goals you set and what direction you will take in life.

**4. Manage Momentum**

I've worked with dozens of CEOs, vice presidents, businessmen, and businesswomen who got excited about a new initiative or direction in their companies, but two weeks later, any momentum they had fizzled.

You can best manage any momentum by securing support and surrounding yourself with people who, not only are on board with you, but also share your vision. Managing momentum leads to the



fifth step, which is finding an accountability partner or partners to help keep you on task.

### 5. Secure Support by Building an Army around You

Do you ever notice when you set goals, you get excited, but your excitement levels off rather quickly? It's like when you sign up for a health club membership on January 2, but by the middle of February, you've lost your drive to exercise. If you had a workout buddy, however, you'd be far more likely to keep that 6:30 AM exercise appointment.

Your buddies or army are close friends or accountability partners who have your back. Another word for accountability partners is *wingmen*. Wingmen, who act as sounding boards, are part of your inner circle.

When you're trying to get clear, wingmen are those with listening ears who know you well and can see things you don't see. They give you vision and are pillars of support, but you have to be willing to hear what they have to say—and even invite them to share their opinions.

### 6. Last, Be Thinking about Game Changers

When it comes to moving the needle, sometimes you have to make bold moves. What could you do to shake things up?

## SEE ALL OBSTACLES IN YOUR WAY

So, can you see clearly now?

That reminds me of a hit song from the early 1970s titled “I Can See Clearly Now” by Johnny Nash. Originally a pop-reggae hit, some may recognize it from the soundtrack of *Cool Runnings*, the 1993 film about the Jamaican bobsled team.

I can still hear the upbeat tempo in my head, but singer Johnny Nash may have been ahead of his time. In the recap below, I share steps you can take to get clear so that you can enjoy a bright, bright, sunshiny day.

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As the great artist Michelangelo said, “The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short, but in setting our aim too low and achieving our mark.”

**Joe’s Recap****When It Comes to Getting Clear, First Get Quiet**

Keep these thoughts in mind as you consider making some major changes:

- To get clear, it's important to get quiet.
- Realize that today's technology makes it almost impossible to get quiet. That means you'll have to act intentionally.
- Establish a morning routine that includes quiet reflective time. Start by spending 10 minutes each day in silence. If you can't find 10 minutes, start with 2 minutes.
- Try to turn off smartphone notifications and check your e-mails two or three times a day. You will become much more productive and free from distractions.
- Look for ways *not* to be so busy, which will greatly increase your opportunity to get clear.
- Remove clutter by taking care of 1- to 3-minute tasks immediately.
- Try to free up time for yourself by finding areas you can cut back on, such as watching TV and getting caught up on social media.
- Become aware. What do you eat, drink, think, and do? What are your favorite activities? With whom do you spend time?



- After you figure out what you want, create a big enough why.
- Manage the momentum on your journey by securing proper support.
- Be thinking about creating a game changer in your life. What's one thing you could do today or this week to shake things up?

**Exercises**

1. Do you currently take quiet time in your day? If not, where and when will you take time to pause and get quiet? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Fill out the Winning Action Plan. Create a goal for each of the following five categories. Start with an end in mind, asking *why* you have chosen this goal and listing the action steps needed to reach the goal. Think through how you will keep the momentum going and what support will be needed. Be sure to list in detail.
3. What would be a great game changer in your life? What steps do you need to take to make it happen?  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What do you need to say *no* to in your life to get clear?  
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\_\_\_\_\_

*(continued)*

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## GET CLEAR

*(continued)*

Winning Action Plan				
Goals	Why	Actions	Manage Momentum	Secure Support
1. Business	1.	1.		
	2.	2.		
	3.	3.		
	4.	4.		
	5.	5.		
2. Personal	1.	1.		
	2.	2.		
	3.	3.		
	4.	4.		
	5.	5.		
3. Family	1.	1.		
	2.	2.		
	3.	3.		
	4.	4.		
	5.	5.		
4. Health	1.	1.		
	2.	2.		
	3.	3.		
	4.	4.		
	5.	5.		
5. Financial	1.	1.		
	2.	2.		
	3.	3.		
	4.	4.		
	5.	5.		

**FIGURE 1.1**