

# REALIZE

“Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.”

– Carl Jung

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I’m still not sure exactly when I first realized I had a problem.

I began to notice that I couldn’t focus the way I used to. I felt on edge often and I wasn’t having much fun at all, constantly putting off “me” time and time with friends and family to keep up with commitments. I was almost always either online or on my phone, needlessly consuming content with no real bearing on either my personal or work lives.

Diving deep into topics for my research had become increasingly difficult, and I couldn’t sit still and read a book for more than 10 or 15 minutes, whereas losing myself in a book used to be a great joy. I kept forgetting about important events coming up, and found myself making lots of careless little mistakes. I would also catch myself staring at a screen or talking at people when I was in meetings or out with friends more than listening.

I had everything in check . . . or, so I thought. I was still getting things done. I was cranking through to-do lists. I was producing. I was studying and learning. I couldn't see yet that everything took much longer than it should or that the output was only a small reflection of what was possible. I didn't see that other important missions and relationships were languishing.

It took a great level of awareness, practice, and discipline to notice my distraction and concentrate.

As I became more and more distracted, I had to work hard to catch myself in the acts of swerving away from what I was doing or trying to accomplish, and then deliberately stop and force myself to re-center. The same was true for conversations or studying or reading. It took a great level of awareness, practice, and discipline to notice my distraction and concentrate.

Yet I only began to take a serious look at what was happening when I sat down to write the proposal for what was initially going to be my next book. One year later, I shelved the project. Though I'm still devastated about it, I learned something about myself in the process that led me to write this other book, to this moment with you.

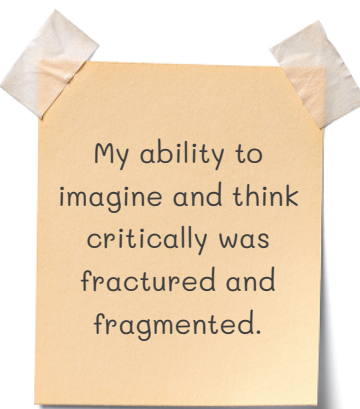
After I closed the chapter on my previous book, I couldn't wait to imagine new possibilities, to pursue another dimension of creativity . . . to learn, experiment, and push the boundaries of what books could be and how we interact with them. The romance of my last creative affair ensnared me and unlocked a desire for not only another similar liaison, but also for something deeper and even

more impassioned. It took just over two years to officially embrace the fact that the time had come to create something new.

I not only took longer between projects, but when I finally sat down to explore the depths of my next idea, I struggled. I froze. Something was different. Ideation

was limited and quite honestly, average. I thought “Maybe it’s just cobwebs.” That’s partially true. I noticed more problems, however. I couldn’t dive as deep as I used to. My ability to imagine and think critically was fractured and fragmented. When I finally, FINALLY reached creative depths, I couldn’t stay there for long without coming up for distractions that would, for some strange reason, serve as oxygen.

Rather than stepping back to reflect and analyze, I tried harder. I became anxious about everything, even the simplest of projects, which triggered procrastination and avoidance. Over time, my penchant for procrastination became pronounced. It was just a given and instead of understanding the cause, I learned the phases of working around and through it. But ultimately, my activity shifted to bursts instead of solid streams. My to-do list was only focused on what was absolutely due, while everything else languished, which, I learned, causes an entirely different level of anxiety. The more items reside on the list, the more stress they cause by just sitting there. It didn’t matter. I had become a “fireman” putting out only burning fires and always planning to focus on, but really never getting to, other (less) critical tasks.



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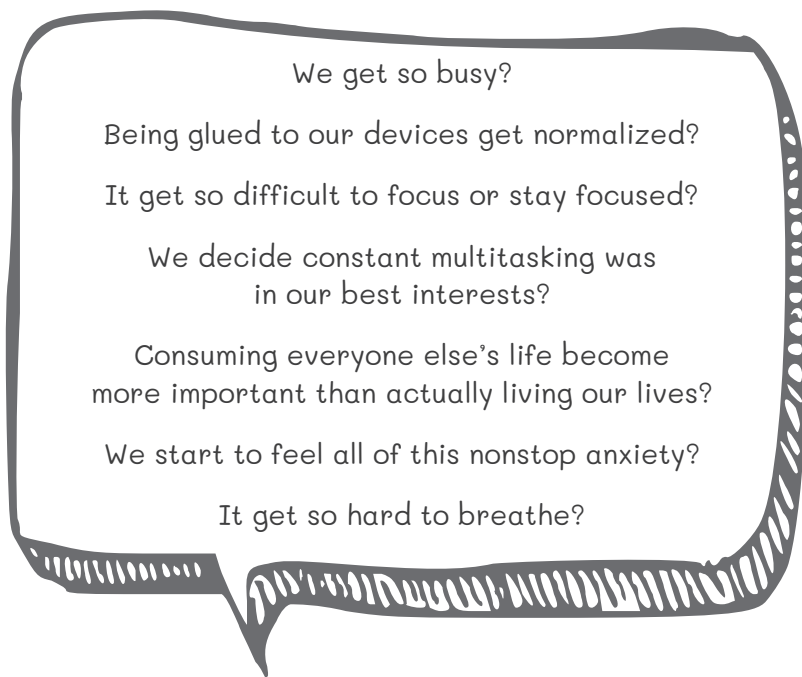
I berated and questioned myself. I was losing self-esteem. And as my confidence and creativity deflated, I started to realize that my happiness was also fading. I just couldn’t identify or admit it in the moment. I couldn’t exactly pinpoint what was happening or why.

Then one day I was struggling to complete an article titled “How to Focus While Being Distracted,” and the irony hit me, *hard*. I was totally distracted, being drawn to notification after notification from Snapchat, Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter. I’d tell myself not to reach for my phone, but there I’d be checking out a picture of that funny sandwich board outside of one of my friends’ favorite cafés that read, “Next time you’re afraid to share ideas, remember someone once said in a meeting, ‘Let’s make a film with a tornado full of sharks.’” Ha, ha, ha!!

After a year of emotionally and intellectually treading water, I pressed pause. Not only was I afraid that I was losing my creative spark, I feared that I was losing touch with my ability to feel happiness. I realized that I was constantly postponing pursuit of my most significant dreams and aspirations, and I felt that I was actually losing the idea of who I really am, and want to be. All of my distraction was preventing me from living as I truly found meaningful.

When I shared this story with loved ones, so many of them shared tales of similar experiences. That's when I realized that I needed to look for answers, for myself, for them, and for you too.

Ask yourself, when did:



We started consuming more than we were creating. We traded expression and imagination for scrolls and swipes. We were intoxicated by the blurring of life between physical and digital.

Every day we do our best to navigate life and keep up with our personal and professional responsibilities, but at the end of each day, we're still fighting to complete our self-imposed to-do lists, both at work and at home, a hamster-wheel process that detracts from our longer-term goals and dreams.<sup>1</sup>

A sort of Zombie Apocalypse has quietly crept up to our doorsteps.

I've seen it with my own eyes, you see it everywhere (when you happen to look up), dozens of people of all ages, impervious to traffic and the risk to their own lives, crossing the street glued to their phones. In New York, for example, thousands of teens end up in the emergency room every year thanks to traffic accidents caused by mobile distraction.

Around the world, urban planners are rethinking crosswalk design to prevent this type of thing from happening, while sidewalks in China now have designated cell phone lanes.



Every day, we're finding it harder to disconnect, if we're trying to disconnect at all. Yet, every part of our lives is being disrupted. We're suffering from thinning attention spans, reduced empathy, narrowed inputs for intellectual and creative guidance and inspiration, diminished capacity for critical thinking, deep focus and creativity.

There's a direct path to happiness and it's through creativity; the benefits of that relationship are incredible.

All of our toggling between apps, networks, email, and texts comes at a tremendous cost to the actual work we're meant to be doing. Did you know that a significant share of the U.S. workforce spends two hours or more checking their smartphone at work every day? That adds up to at least 10 hours every week taken away from performing their jobs. Ten years ago, the average person shifted attention every three minutes. Now, employees will last a whole 45 seconds before shifting their focus. What's more, today's average employee will check email 74 times a day and switch tasks on their computer 566 times per day. Additionally, when people are stressed, "they tend to shift their attention more rapidly," according to Dr. Mark. "So, we're in this vicious, habitual cycle."

To get a sense of how much time you're spending with distractions, count, in just one day, how many times you...

Reach for a device

Check messages (total of all the messaging apps)

Check your feeds for updates

Share an experience or moment or simply a picture of yourself

Switch between any of the above and your work

Each time we waste time by falling into rabbit holes of digital distraction, we're paying an opportunity cost. And we're not just losing time we could invest better elsewhere, we are teaching ourselves that it's okay to waste time. Meanwhile, not only is our distraction eroding our productivity, it's undermining our mental health and well-being, inducing stress, anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem and depression.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, through social media, we share an upbeat slice of our lives that gives everyone the impression we're happy and thriving, seamlessly balancing work and family, ambitious goals and adventurous leisure. The irony is that when we're not just posturing on social media, we're compelling the people who follow us to feel like they're not measuring up. Little do they know, however, we aren't actually living our best life, just a semblance of it. Deep down, we're not happy.

We keep telling ourselves we're fine—there's nothing to see here folks! We'll get to our hopes and dreams one day! But they seem to be gaining distance from us. We're also not as happy or as creative as we could be. And, those two things are interlinked . . . happiness and creativity.

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There's a direct path to happiness and it's through creativity; the benefits of that relationship are incredible. Your life at work, home, school, your side hustle, your relationships all greatly profit from your ability to devote time to thinking creatively.

This book isn't a rant about our relationship with technology. It's a guide to re-centering our minds and souls, freeing ourselves of the barrage of distractions and rekindling our creativity.

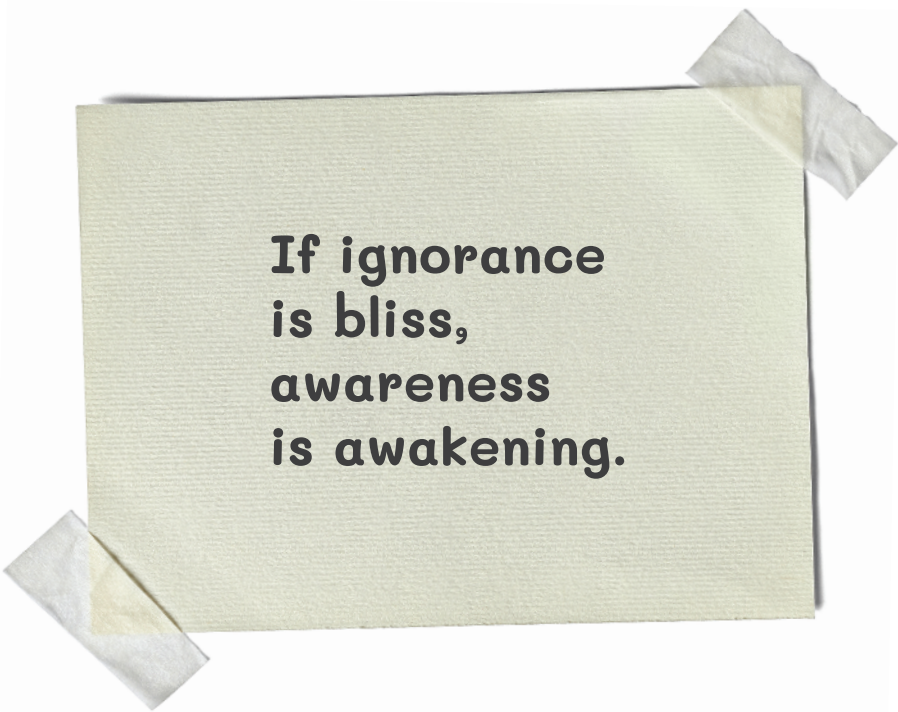
After two decades of promoting the virtues and promise of disruptive technology, I found myself at a crossroads. I could either continue dedicating my time to visualizing optimistic and productive scenarios for the future technology will bring—slowly and painfully as that work was going—or I could shift my focus to unraveling what was going wrong, for me and so many others, and how to get back on a healthy track.

I could only make one decision.

If ignorance is bliss, awareness is awakening. I realized that I needed to learn why I was falling prey to distraction; and to build new skills for focusing and tapping my creativity. I had to learn to build a buffer against the ever-evolving set of detractors, and to unlearn bad habits. And in order to truly revive my creative productivity, I also needed to reassess what I truly valued and dissect my own happiness and how I defined it. I set out to get my creativity and my happiness back, and I went on a journey of discovery. Along the way, I learned how to build a constructive new regimen, involving powerful creative habits, and to raise my self-awareness so that I could stick to that new life routine.

I call the method I developed for charting and staying on this new focused and productively creative course lifescaling; it's a process for achieving an intentional state of happiness, creativity and mastery in the face of the onslaught of distractions. Lifescaling isn't just about performance, it's about finding authentic happiness through unleashing your creativity, and about defining your own path in life, your own way.

The first step in lifescaling is coming to terms with why we've become so addicted to distraction. It's certainly not entirely our fault—not by a long shot—but the truth is that we've been complicit. So let's start by investigating why.



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