

CHAPTER 1

Our Attention-Deficit Society

Have you ever heard someone say, “I have ADD today”?

ADD (attention-deficit disorder) has become a catchphrase for laziness, often used as an excuse for procrastination, lack of productivity, being easily distracted, not paying attention, and not completing tasks. People seem to wear it like a badge of honor, which is odd if you think about it.

ADD and ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) are true disorders that require medical treatment. They are physiological, biochemical disorders that make it hard for a person to stay focused and pay attention, thus limiting their ability to perform to their full potential.

When I say that we have become an *attention-deficit society*, I don't say it lightly. One of my family members was diagnosed with ADD in 1992, and I have seen the impacts of this firsthand. But I use this phrase intentionally to drive the point home that there is an epidemic of inattention in our

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world—a widespread, serious condition that has real consequences. Consider the following:

- Nine people die every day and 1,153 people are injured because of distracted driving. These are not just nameless, faceless people. These are partners, mothers, fathers, children, siblings, and friends. Possibly yours.
- The death count of pedestrians in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is steadily rising due to distracted walking. They have a light rail system, and people are so absorbed with their cell phones they don't even see a train coming at them!
- According to a study by the Information Overload Group, \$588 billion is lost every year in U.S. businesses alone because of interruptions.
- In a study of 2,000 respondents, *Think Money* found a total of 759 hours (that's 31 days!) in lost time every year due to distractions.
- Since the year 1900, about 477 different species have become extinct because of our inattention to our environment and the destruction of natural habitats.
- The Global Nonrenewable Natural Resource Scarcity Assessment found that 23 of the 26 (88%) nonrenewable natural resources it analyzed will likely experience permanent global supply shortfalls by the year 2030.

Our inattention has real, often lasting, and sometimes devastating consequences. We think we are paying attention, but we aren't. We are allowing other people, devices, and circumstances to control our attention.

Those with true ADD don't have a choice in how well they pay attention. The rest of us do. We don't have ADD; we have IBC—*inattention by choice*. We have control of our brains,

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our thought processes, and our habits. Stop thinking that you have no power over your inattention and lack of productivity. Nothing could be further from the truth.

So, how did we get here? How did we become an attention-deficit society?

It's not because we're not smart or because we don't care, but because so many other things are competing for our attention, both online and offline. The causes of the attention-deficit society are both internal and external forces. Our fast paced, device-dependent, hyperconnected world is speeding up, not slowing down. We have so many distractions and decisions, we can't focus in the moment for a minute.

Let's take a closer look at each of these internal and external factors.

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Our internal world is a significant factor in our struggle to pay attention. Our beliefs, our feelings, our health, and even our generation play a role in how well we pay attention.

The Great Multitasking Myth

In our modern world, the number of things that demand our attention has dramatically increased. We are being pulled in so many different directions and being asked to produce better results faster and with fewer resources. Our solution has been to multitask or *manic-task*, as I call it. I've been guilty of this—frantically switching between screens, paper, calls, and to-do lists in an attempt to get it all done.

For years, we've been told that multitasking was the way to be more efficient and productive. Too bad it's not true. The reality is we are multitasking more yet achieving less. We are busy, but not productive. We still feel like we can't get it all done. Don't you feel that? And it's stressful, right?

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The idea that multitasking will help us get more done is a myth. As a result of numerous studies and neuroscience research, we now know that the brain is incapable of performing multiple tasks simultaneously (yes, including talking and texting). Rather than multitasking, the brain is rapidly shifting from one task to another. And each time the brain switches tasks, it has to go through a start-stop-start process. Some estimates suggest that productivity goes down by as much as 40% to 50% when we task switch. Other studies have found that because this task switching increases the cognitive load on our brains, it also increases the chances of making mistakes and missing important information and cues, as well as hinders problem solving and creativity.

In his book *Free*, Chris Anderson, founder of TED Talks and editor-in-chief of *Wired* magazine, asked the reader, “Does multitasking just slice the same attention more finely?”

The answer is *yes*. We are splitting our attention in many different directions, giving a piece of our attention here, a piece there, and another piece over there. As a result, nothing is getting our true attention and everything is getting short-changed. We need to replace our manic-tasking with single-tasking or *sane-tasking*, as I call it—staying sane while focusing our attention on the important conversation, proposal, or project at hand until it is completed.

Which do *you* do more of—manic-tasking or sane-tasking?

The “Over Trilogy”—Overwhelmed, Overstressed, and Overtired

I imagine you are a high achiever. You want more, you hustle, you want to be at the top, have the best team, achieve the president’s award, or get a fantastic rating on your annual performance review. You want it all. Many of us do. But that leads to a dangerous condition that I call the “Over Trilogy”—the fact

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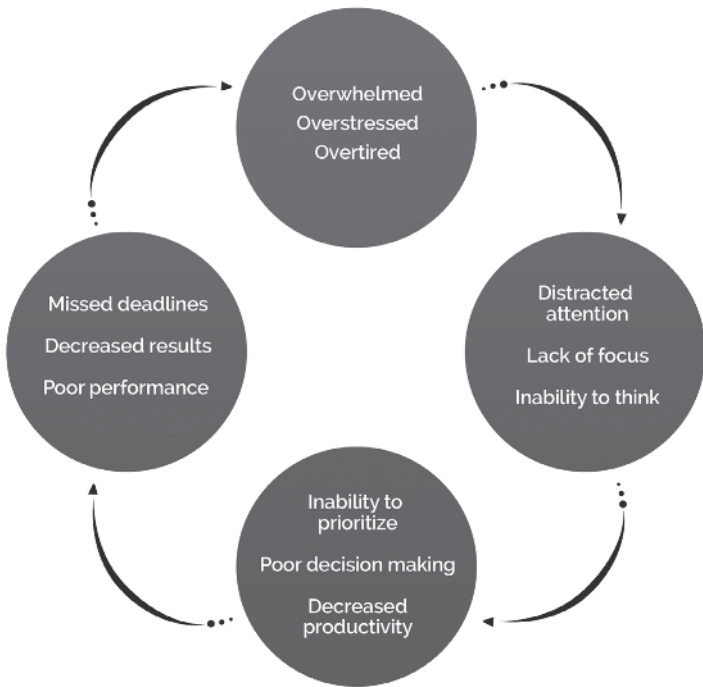


Figure 1.1. The Over Trilogy Cycle

that too many of us are constantly overwhelmed, overstressed, and overtired.

We feel constantly overwhelmed as our responsibilities at work and at home continue to grow. We attempt to answer emails between meetings, eat on the run living on protein bars, create some structure for our teams, respond to the boss, and then look after our family. Our boss has expectations of us, our partners have different expectations, and then we have expectations of ourselves about what we can achieve. We want so much more in life, but we don't know where to begin.

If you are like most of the leaders I work with, you are more stressed than ever before. And you're not alone.

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A recent study conducted by the American Psychological Association found that average stress levels in the United States rose yet again from 4.9 to 5.1 on a 10-point stress scale. In addition, 24% of adults reported being extremely stressed, compared to 18% a year earlier.

Chronic stress impairs our ability to shift our attention. A 2009 study of stressed-out medical students found that stress affects the attention-regulating area of the prefrontal cortex of the brain. The study's author shared, "It's reassuring that this attention-shifting deficit seems to go away after the stress is reduced, but such deficits are similar to what we see in some stress-related psychiatric disorders."

More than that, stress is a silent killer. We can't see it or touch it or smell it. But we can see the impacts of it. Chronic stress is linked to the six leading causes of death (heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide), and more than 75% of all physician office visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints.

Constantly feeling overwhelmed and overstressed leads to being overtired. Too many of us (yes, I'm guilty of it, too) are living an around-the-clock schedule, staying up too late or getting up too early in a futile effort to get it all done. Chronic lack of sleep impacts our mental alertness, productivity, attitude, and emotions. But it can also lead to serious medical conditions and shorten life expectancy.

Even if we make it into the bed at a reasonable hour, how often do we lie in bed tossing and turning, letting overwhelm and overstress take over our minds? I often refer to the overwhelm and overstress combination as *Chip*, like a chip on your shoulder (apologies to my friend whose real name is Chip). I think of Chip as this vicious green gremlin who visits late at night. He taunts you relentlessly, reminding you of everything you didn't get done today. He's ugly, and he distracts you.

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What does the Over Trilogy have to do with attention? Everything! Being overwhelmed, overstressed, and overtired impacts our health and our relationships. A constant level of overwhelm, stress, and fatigue deeply affects our attention and takes up valuable real estate in our brain, thus negatively impacting the way our brain processes information. This leads to decreased productivity and eventually decreased results, which triggers even more feelings of being overwhelmed, overstressed, and overtired. The result is a never-ending, vicious cycle.

It's time to punch Chip in the face, tell him he's not welcome, and decide that you are done being overwhelmed, overstressed, and overtired. It's no way to live. Instead, choose to live a meaningful life filled with significant moments.

Generational Differences

I speak to a lot of people every year. People think I can't see them in the audience because of the lights, but I can. In fact, I make it a habit to observe whether my audience members are paying attention to me. (The responsibility is on me, the speaker, to keep them engaged. The same is true for any speaker, or any leader for that matter.) I've noticed some differences that seem to run along generational lines. You would likely notice the same differences if you observed the audience at your CEO's annual presentation or groups of friends sitting around tables at a restaurant.

The older generations will put their devices away and look at the speaker or at each other. Now, that doesn't mean they are paying attention! They could be thinking about problems at work, problems at home, what they're going to say next, or running through the to-do lists in their head.

The younger generations have their phones out, typing away, perhaps tweeting a great quote from the CEO, or posting a picture of their entrée. Older generations tend to believe

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younger generations are being rude when they are on their phones in the company of others. Younger generations would never be offended by someone being on a phone in their presence. They are just excited to spread the latest news, whatever that may be.

Both older and younger generations likely think they are paying attention. Both probably aren't.

But their perceptions of their own and others' attention are very different. Those who grew up before the advent of the internet and smartphone likely know how to give someone undivided attention, how to be present in the moment during a special event, or how to focus on a task for more than a few minutes. But like any good skill, if you don't use it, you lose it. Those who grew up in the digital age have never known anything other than a multitasking, multiscreen, always-connected existence.

The youngest generation is growing up on a full-time diet of technology, electronics, and social media almost from the time they are infants. Their babysitters are watching movies on a tablet and playing games on smartphones. According to a study performed by the International Center for Media & the Public Agenda, most children and teens spend 75% of their waking lives with their eyes fixed on a screen. It remains to be seen if their brains will actually be wired differently than the brains of older generations. In the meantime, we know the brain can't do two things at once.

I recently had a conversation with my incredibly talented 21-year-old neighbor about attention and his generation. He said when his generation meets with people who are older than them, they don't tend to be on their devices out of respect. (Except with their parents—they think that's very different.) It was fascinating. That tells me that, despite what younger generations tell us about their ability to pay attention to more than one thing at time, deep down they know it isn't true.

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Whichever generation you resonate with, we need to understand not all generations see attention the same way as us. Let's focus on how we can be better at paying attention, regardless of the generation to which we belong.

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Our beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and even our age affect our ability to pay attention. But our inattention is not just an inside job. There are external influences that compromise our attention, as well.

Physical Environment

If you are sitting at your desk right now, look up. Take a good look around you. Do you have paper everywhere? Big piles of things to do? A full physical inbox of projects needing your input, journals that need reading, or proposals that need responding to? When you look at your computer screen, do you have a huge email inbox that you use as your to-do list?

When you arrive home after work, can you park your car in your garage? Or is the space filled with boxes and projects and reminders of things you *have to do*?

Our physical environment affects our ability to achieve results. If it feels out of control, disorganized, and chaotic, we are less likely to know where to focus first.

Open-plan environments are another physical factor that can dramatically impact our attention and productivity. Open-plan environments are popular and beneficial for teams with high collaboration, and allow a larger number of people in one space. Many successful organizations have moved to this model including Facebook, Cisco, Microsoft, Google, and eBay.

While companies will not go back to offices any time soon, we need to understand as leaders that an open-plan environment creates massive distractions for all team members

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and impacts productivity negatively. Their attention will be split, their phone calls will be heard, their sales will be affected, and team morale will be impacted.

You can make open-plan work only with training, guidelines, and old-fashioned good manners and thoughtful team members.

Visit neenjames.com to download my free 10-Day Open Plan Productivity Action Plan and Open Plan Survival Tips.

The Survival Tips can be found directly at neenjames.com/extras.

How the Media and Information Overload Changed Our Attention

If you didn't pay attention as a caveman or cave woman, you just might get eaten by a saber-toothed tiger or pick the wrong berries to eat. That was good incentive to know what was happening around you. Paying attention was critical to survival. Fortunately for our early ancestors, they didn't have TV and other modern technologies to distract them!

Over time, people began to multiply, explore new areas, and build and live in larger communities. With the invention of tools and resources to make people's lives easier, attention shifted from survival to communication, trade, and learning about the world.

Just 80 years ago, families stopped what they were doing to gather around the radio to hear the news that was impacting their world. With limited information, everyone gave that information their undivided attention.

With the invention of the television, our world exponentially expanded, but information was still generally limited

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to one daily print edition of the newspaper and a few daily television newscasts. When I was a child, TV was a treat. It had a place in our home, but it wasn't on all day. When my husband and I got married, we didn't own a TV for the first two years and we loved that. We made a conscious choice not to have a television; newlyweds have far more interesting things to do!

Today, with almost unlimited cable and satellite channels, people can tune into the news—or any other channel for that matter—24 hours a day. I have stayed with friends at their homes (or even sharing a hotel room) and the first thing they do when they wake up is turn on the TV. Now, we eat with the TV or phone or other device instead of with people.

When Netflix began creating shows that allowed every episode to be available at once (instead of waiting from one week to the next), we changed our viewing habits. Binge-watching is one of the latest ways media steals our attention. The Diffusion Group (TDG) published research findings on exstreamist.com that we spend more time watching Netflix than eating, reading, or having sex!

But that's not the end of it. Now, we get our news and entertainment through screens and apps on our devices. We can google anything and there is a YouTube video for how to do everything. I heard the news that Michael Jackson died on Twitter. I often learn about world events on Facebook posts or tweets from those in affected areas. Social media has changed the way we receive breaking news; it has created millions of unofficial journalists sharing stories from all over the world and it has created skeptical viewers now that *fake news* has become a real issue.

According to Adrian Ott, one of Silicon Valley's most respected strategists and the author of the book *The 24-Hour Customer*, we see more than 34 billion bits of information per day online. That is the equivalent of two books a day! And all

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that information creates pressure on what she calls *the attention bottleneck*—the imbalance between the rate of information growth relative to the fixed constraint of time. She explains,

In 16 waking hours a day, people can only comprehend a finite amount of what's thrown at them. The information coming into the top of the funnel is growing at an increasing rate while the intake at the bottom remains fixed, adding pressure to the attention bottleneck This dynamic has driven an attention arms race where it feels like we are in Times Square with lights flashing and noise blaring all the time, no matter where we are. The kind of discipline required to shut out the world and avoid multitasking with all the electronic temptations at our fingertips is significantly greater than in the past.

In addition, advertisers have become incredibly savvy at manipulating our attention. Leveraging technology that measures brain activity and heart rate, as well as tracks eyeballs to see what colors, messages, and images cause emotional reactions, they can design campaigns that get and keep our attention.

Our exposure to choices and information is much greater than in our parents' time. With information overload, it seems no one pays much attention to anything. Herbert Simon, a social scientist in 1971, said, "A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention." Wise words.

Our Technology Addiction

Have you ever been at a wedding (or even worse, a funeral) and heard a cell phone ring? I don't care who you are or what message someone is trying to get to you. Nothing about this is okay.

In our attention-deficit society, we have become hyper-focused on our smartphones, smart devices, social media,

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and text messaging, rather than on who or what is important in the moment. We have made technology more important than people.

My talented friend and sales and leadership speaker Connie Podesta shared a story with me. She and a friend had agreed to meet but only had 60 minutes due to their busy schedules. When the time was over, the friend had spent 50% of that time on her cell phone and responding to messages. Her friend lamented their time had come to an end but commented on how good it had been to catch up. My brave and fabulous friend Connie replied, “It would have been nice to catch up, but you spent half the time on your phone.”

We have all come to accept people being on devices while in conversation as normal and acceptable. It’s not! We need more people like Connie—willing to point out the truth about our obsession with our devices and technology. I have been known to say to my honey, “I am more interesting than your phone.” It may sound arrogant as you read it, but it’s true. I am interesting and it makes him laugh.

Have you ever found yourself reaching for your device if a person, or meeting, or a movie didn’t engage you? It’s become our default. Our technology and our devices have become our companionship. Here’s something scary: The International Center for Media & the Public Agenda found that students who unplugged their electronic devices for one 24-hour period felt extremely lonely and didn’t know how to fill their time.

The truth is, we are addicted. And I don’t mean figuratively, I mean literally.

Dr. Nicholas Kardaras, author of *Glow Kids: How Screen Addiction Is Hijacking Our Kids—and How to Break the Trance*, says there’s a very real reason why it’s so hard to coax people away from their devices. “We now know that those iPads, smartphones, and Xboxes are a form of digital drug.

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Recent brain imaging research is showing that they affect the brain's frontal cortex—which controls executive functioning, including impulse control—in exactly the same way that cocaine does. Technology is so hyper-arousing that it raises dopamine levels—the feel-good neurotransmitter most involved in the addiction dynamic—as much as sex.”

As much as we may not want to admit that we are addicted to our devices, we know we are. Have you ever left the house without your cell phone? Did you go back to get it? Even if it made you late for work or you missed your train? Of course you did!

The idea of a *digital detox* gives some people heart palpitations. Do you know how many times we touch our cell phones in a day? Take a guess.

Think You're Not Addicted to Technology?

There are numerous apps available that track how much time you spend on your smartphone. You can leverage technology to actually help your attention. Install one and see how much time you are really spending on your phone. I installed one and was shocked at how much time I was wasting on my device. This dependency on our technology is impacting our relationships and our performance. Imagine what your life would be like if you gave the people, priorities, and passions that are important to you half of the attention you give your devices! Do you want to write a book? Imagine if you added to it 2,617 times a day. Imagine what you could achieve if you invested only a third of that time developing a new skill you want to develop?

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Go to neenjames.com/extras for my favorite Attention Resources.

According to a recent Dscout study, the average user touches their cell phone 2,617 time per day! Imagine touching anything—or anyone—that many times a day! If you are an extreme user—someone who is never separated from your device—you might touch your cell phone over 5,400 times per day! That's just crazy!

Now, you might think that I believe technology is the evil enemy of attention. Not at all. Technology is an amazing tool that has become an integral part of societal change. It gets blamed (a lot) for our lack of attention, but when leveraged well, it can help us achieve more in shorter periods of time and create a further reach than we ever thought possible.

But we have willingly given away our power and our control to our devices. We have allowed our devices to dictate our time and our attention, and therefore our lives.

We haven't figure out how to deal with technology's incessant demand on our attention. We haven't learned how to use technology appropriately and still be productive and so our attention is devoured online. We haven't designed the rules or taught people how to behave in the digital age with manners and respect.

Technology, when used wisely, can increase attention and productivity and connectivity. Like any good thing, using technology in moderation is a powerful tool for all of us. We need to leverage technology, not reject it. We need to be disciplined in our use of technology, especially while in the company of the people around us. The key is to use it for good (productivity), and not evil (pure distraction). We get to choose our relationship with technology. We can reclaim

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our time and attention, and this book will show you exactly how to do this.

Our Addiction to Social Media and Apps

The first tweet by one of the Twitter founders, Jack Dorsey, sent on March 21, 2006, at 9:50 p.m. read, “just setting up my twtr.” This one action forever changed the status updates for social media. When Twitter launched in July of that year, they could not have begun to imagine the far-reaching impact they would have on the world’s attention.

Twitter and all its social media cousins have become part of our daily attention and conversation—and our obsession. Our addiction to our technology is driven largely by our addiction to social media and apps.

Apps and social media are stealing our attention. We have become obsessed with likes, and retweets, and finding the perfect *gif* response to post. We miss the amazing play or moment at the concert because we are updating our Instagram. We miss the bus because we are enthralled with the latest video on one of our YouTube subscriptions. We miss our floor on the elevator because we were reading Twitter. We miss the green light because we are checking Facebook.

The CEO of a technology and data company recently shared with me his frustration about one of his senior leaders who appeared to be addicted to Candy Crush. In every spare moment, his director was online and had to be counseled twice in one week. The leader tried to explain it was his form of relaxation but after much questioning, he reluctantly admitted that his workload had fallen behind, he had emails in his inbox that hadn’t been answered for five days, and he was two weeks behind in developing a database for a client. Remember, this is a smart, functioning adult.

Maybe you don’t play Candy Crush but you feel a need to check every notification of a new email, text, tweet, or post on

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Facebook or LinkedIn, or maybe you have created Pinterest boards to plan your perfectly designed office or maybe you monitor every like you get on Instagram?

Gut check time: How much of *your* attention is being stolen by apps and social media?

Do we really have to include in our employee policies that people can't play Candy Crush or check social media at work? Possibly. Some of our obsession is driven by habit and some of it by boredom. And it could be that the voyeuristic interest in other people's lives is more exciting than whatever work is in front of us.

But there is more to it than that. The addiction is real. Our impulse to play one more game and check social media is driven by dopamine and the reward center of the brain. A recent study conducted by researchers at Harvard University found that sharing information about ourselves on social media activates the same part of the brain that is associated with the sensation of pleasure, the same pleasure that we get from eating food, getting money, or having sex. Researchers also learned that there is even greater activity in the reward center of the brain when we share our thoughts with family or friends.

People are addicted to likes and other *vanity metrics* (a term coined by Eric Ries, author of the book *The Lean Start-Up*). "It's an endless pursuit of vanity metrics that stroke the ego," says speaker and author of *UnMarketing*, Scott Stratten.

Another factor in our addiction is FOMO—Fear of Missing Out. We have to be on this or that social media network because "everybody" is on this or that social media network. What if we aren't up to date on what our friends are talking about? What if we miss out on the latest news? Even people who don't like social media feel compelled to join because that's where all of their family, friends, and colleagues are spending their time.

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Technology and social media companies and app developers also very consciously and intentionally feed our addictions. Tristan Harris, a former Google design ethicist and an executive at Time Well Spent, believes advertisers and these companies are hijacking our brains. He's passionate about this topic. Harris shares that companies are investing millions of dollars in app, screen design, incentives, and advertisements to get and keep our attention.

Mike Elgan, technology and tech culture columnist at *ComputerWorld*, believes, "Social networking is engineered to be as habit-forming as crack cocaine." He points out that social media sites become more addictive every day through developer strategies like notification numbers, click bait, and algorithmic filters: "... the sites are in a war for survival where only the most addictive sites will survive. Meanwhile, our innate human ability to resist this addiction doesn't evolve."

I can hear you now: "Neen, social media and technology allow me to connect with more people more often." In Australia, we have a saying: "Rubbish!" (the equivalent of *bull*****). Let's get real. Liking a friend from high school's vacation picture or responding with an emoji to the news of a death in a former coworker's family is not a real connection.

I'm not trying to bash social media. It can be a powerful way to show someone attention. I give lots of *intentional* attention to family, friends, colleagues, and clients on Facebook and other platforms. It also allows me to connect to my family in Australia, chat with friends around the world, and witness life-changing events for others in real time.

But love it or hate it, there is no denying that social media demands our attention. While we scroll through Facebook, scroll through Instagram stories, and scroll through Twitter, we are mindlessly scrolling through our lives. I doubt anyone will say on their deathbed, "I wish I'd posted one more tweet

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or picture.” But sadly, they just might say, “I wish I’d paid more attention to the people I was with rather than the ones on social media.”

Destruction of the Work-Life Boundary

Many of you reading this book are too young to remember the “old days” when you arrived at your workplace, went to an office, sat at your desk, and looked in your physical inbox where you had a pile of papers that were your tasks to be completed for that day. As a task was completed, it went in the physical outbox or was distributed throughout your organization via a written memo placed in mailboxes in a mailroom. Once your inbox was empty, your work was done and you went home. I know. Sounds crazy, right?

In your personal time, you exercised, pursued hobbies, spent time with your family or friends, ate around the dinner table, and went to your kids’ activities—where you actually paid attention and connected with other parents. You could answer truthfully when your child asked if you saw their big moment. You might occasionally have taken some work or work-related reading home, but there were very clear boundaries between what happened at work and what happened at home. We respected office hours.

And then technology changed our lives. We began using systems like email and instant message, and then pagers. Cell phones, originally purchased for some to make us feel safe or for use in an emergency, made us available to just about anyone at any time of the day or night. Our technology created a prison of sorts. We are now trapped by our accessibility.

We have moved from very clear boundaries between work and home to being always “on.” The 9-to-5 has become 24/7, 365. We have stopped respecting boundaries and time zones. We email at all times of the day and night. We respond

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to work requests on weekends. We call in to conference calls when we are on vacation. We watch our kids play sports and sit in on teleconferences. No wonder we are overwhelmed, overstressed, and overtired.

The lines between work life and personal life are blurred, if not gone altogether. We check social media, text messages, and personal email during work hours. We answer work emails during our supposed off time at home, on weekends, and on vacation. The old adage *Leave work at work and home at home*, is a joke.

There was a fundamental shift in the work-life boundary that occurred not long after the smartphone began to get smart. Employers allow employees to work late, work on the weekends, and work slowly the whole time. Leadership has unrealistic expectations that employees should be constantly available. According to the U.S. Travel Association, nearly 20% of managers feel employees who take all earned leave are less dedicated and focused in their jobs. And employees fear their jobs won't be there when they return from a break.

The destruction of the work-life boundary is a huge factor in our attention-deficit society. The problem with always being "on" is that our attention is always constantly split between our work and personal lives. And that means that neither is getting quality attention or quality effort. (Remember the vicious Over Trilogy cycle?, See Figure 1.1)

While technology was the means for the destruction of the work-life boundary, it's not to blame. It's humans that are to blame. We control the tools we use. It's user error. We have to stop the madness!

We all know we can't go back to the old days with a crisp line of demarcation between work and home. The genie is out of the bottle and there is no way he is going back in! But what would happen if we set some boundaries? As organizations, as leaders, and as individuals, we need to make it okay to have

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rest and recovery periods and to recharge our batteries. We need to make it okay to pay attention to what really matters at work when we are there and to what really matters at home when we are there. How much more productive could we be if we focused and paid attention to who and what was important at the appropriate time?

Do you recall when it was bad manners to call someone before 9 a.m. and after 9 p.m.? Did you know about the telemarketing sales law that establishes standards of conduct for telemarketing calls that they can't call you before 8 a.m. or after 9 p.m.? We need to create new rules like this in our organizations. Yes, I'm completely serious. I challenge you to try it and see how much more creative and productive your team becomes.

It's time to stop the insanity and restore some work-life integration. Creating work-life integration is one of the biggest benefits of joining me in my Attention Revolution. You see, I think work-life balance is a myth. Many of us chase work-life balance, and it's like a unicorn; it will never be discovered. The visual of work and life being a set of scales with both sides equal isn't realistic.

I believe in work-life *integration*. What's the difference? Work-life integration is when your environment, emotions, and expectations are what you want them to be. It's creating an environment that works for you. That might mean working from home on a Friday to complete strategic projects.

It's managing your emotions, so you stop feeling guilty about home when you're at work and about work when you're at home. Guilt is a common emotion among executives with whom I work. They feel guilty for staying too long at the office to get things done when they want to be home with their families—the main reason they work as hard as they do. And they feel guilty when they are relaxing

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on Sunday night with their family knowing their emails are piling up and waiting to be answered.

Work-life integration means managing expectations of yourself and others. There is no prescription; it's wholly designed by you, for you, and where you are in your career and circumstances. Unlike the mythical work-life balance, work-life integration is real, and you can have it.

THE COSTS OF THE ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

Every day we waste our attention on inconsequential activities without understanding the consequences of our bad investments. There are huge costs when we don't make the choice to be focused with our attention. We will have big problems personally, professionally, and globally if we allow our attention-deficit society to continue.

Personal Costs

- **Death**—I'm not trying to be dramatic here; I'm trying to be real. When we don't pay attention while we drive, it kills people. Nine people every day. Think about that for a moment. Nine promising lives gone. Nine families changed forever.
- **Our health**—The consequences of not paying attention are often stress and illness. There are many people who don't take the time and attention their body needs, or their soul needs. I stupidly ignored a condition for three years, just thinking (or hoping) maybe it would go away, maybe it would fix itself, maybe I was just getting older. Finally, it became so extreme the only solution was surgery. Surgery revealed I'd been putting up with a condition I didn't need to endure. I just didn't stop to take care of it.

THE COSTS OF THE ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

- The quality of our relationships—If we do not pay attention to the people who are important to us, they will get their attention somewhere else. One of the reasons for the high rate of divorces and affairs is that people don't feel like they're getting the love and attention they need at home from their partner. So, they go on to find it elsewhere. The cost of sadness and regret are immeasurable.

Professional Costs

- Personal brand—The cost of not paying attention to your personal brand and executive presence could be lost promotions and pay increases and getting passed over for opportunities. If your reputation suffers, you could likely lose influence with your boss, executive leadership, board of directors, or shareholders.
- Customer satisfaction—If you're not listening to your customers, clients, patients, or whomever you serve, they will simply leave and go somewhere else. If you are lucky and they stay, you'll quickly find that their lack of satisfaction leads to increased complaints!
- Productivity—Just because people show up for work physically doesn't mean they are there mentally. When our attention is split, the quality of our work suffers. Interruptions and distractions impact our deliverables and our success rate. It costs significant money to have multiple people in unproductive meetings where little is getting accomplished.
- Team engagement—If you don't take care of your team members, they will leave you to work at another company. In the United States, we lose \$11 billion in employee turnover annually according to the Bureau of National Affairs. Paying attention to attracting and retaining your top talent is a wise investment.

OUR ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

- Sales—The cost of not paying attention to your targets (whether you work for an organization or manage your own company) is missed sales opportunities. And we all know what happens when we miss sales goals.
- Profit—When we don't give intentional attention to and in our business, the bottom line suffers. Customer satisfaction, productivity, team engagement, sales—when they drop off, it all falls to the bottom line.

Global Costs

- Resources—Our precious world resources are disappearing, and it's not just fossil fuels and the like. According to Dr. Upmanu Lall, director of the Columbia Water Center and a leading expert on hydroclimatology, as soon as 2025, large parts of the world could experience perennial water shortages. He says, "On a humanitarian level, the possibilities are as devastating as climate change." Many futurists have even theorized the next world war will be fought over water.
- Species—According to Simon Worrall of National Geographic, many people believe that we are in the midst of the sixth mass extinction in Earth's history. The fifth one was when the dinosaurs went extinct. He says, "More species are becoming extinct today than at any time since dinosaurs were wiped off the face of the Earth by an asteroid 65 million years ago. Today we're losing biodiversity at a similar rate. And this is, of course, an anthropogenic mass extinction. The primary cause is human communities." With every species that goes extinct, we not only endanger the future of our own species, but we destroy something very special that

THE COSTS OF THE ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

our grandchildren and their children will never be able to witness.

- Planet—We need to start paying attention to our planet because we are killing it. There are already so many places in the world that will never be the same. As an Australian, I see the Great Barrier Reef, and it breaks my heart to see how global warming has affected the coral reefs and the marine life that I used to take for granted. It's not just the Great Barrier Reef being devastated by our inattention. Look around the world and where you live and you'll find an example. The rainforests and polar ice caps are just two examples.

To be clear, I am not a card-carrying member of Greenpeace (but I do love some of the work they do), and I don't drive a Tesla (although I love them and think they are incredibly sexy cars). But I am passionate about the fact that we have just one planet, and if we continue to take it for granted, we will all pay the price.

If I haven't convinced you yet that we have an attention management crisis on our hands, I'll save you some time—stop reading. There really is no point in reading any further.

On the other hand, if you see the evidence of the attention-deficit society yourself or you think I might just be on to something here, it's time to join the Attention Revolution. Do you really want to just *exist* in an attention-deficit society? Help me start the shift from the attention-deficit society to the *attention-surplus economy*. It doesn't require a huge investment of time or money. It requires us to make a choice. The choice is to be intentional with who, what, and how we spend our attention. We can change this today. Right now. Read on.

Make Your Attention Pay

1. What do you need to change in your physical environment to improve your attention?
2. Do you have a technology addiction you need to address?
3. What work boundaries do you need to set to improve your work-life integration?