



How to Declutter Your Brain

Elizabeth [00:00:00]: Hello, and welcome to Everyday Unicorn, the podcast that helps you harness your magic for greater success in work and life. I'm your host, Elizabeth Hope Derby. I'm a mom, a recovering perfectionist, and a longtime leadership and business coach. In this podcast, I'll teach you the secrets of everyday leadership and how to leverage your brand of magic to supercharge your clarity, confidence, and joy.

No more trying to fake it till you make it or twisting yourself into knots so you can fit inside other people's expectations. Whether you're running a business, evolving your career, or just trying to find balance between being a parent and an actual person, it's time for you to start living your version of success in the office, on the playground, and beyond.

Starting now, you get to make every day a bit more magical just by being you. [00:01:00] So let's get to it.

Hello, and welcome back to Everyday Unicorn. I am super pumped that you're here, as always, and I once again love the topic. So today, I want to talk to you about how you can declutter your brain. I hope that when I say that phrase, you immediately get what I'm talking about, and you say "hallelujah, I cannot wait to declutter my brain because it feels like a crowded room with way too many people and overflowing boxes of papers I should have shredded years ago."

I think of myself as a bit of a decluttering expert. And I say that because I'm a tad fanatical about it. You wouldn't necessarily know that if you came into my house. I think generally things look clean. I have open spaces, but I [00:02:00] also really love color and art and looking at things that make me happy.

So I have a lot of stuff on the walls and on shelves. But to my mind, it's all spacious. There's a lot of white space. There are actually a lot of white walls because I use color to liven up these sorts of blank canvases that I surround myself with. And I purge on a regular basis of this stuff I've outgrown, the stuff that's no longer relevant to whatever season we're in.

And that may be literal, right? Like if I'm redecorating the living room, certain aspects of the living room change with every holiday and every season because that makes me happy. But beyond that, I'm also just very good at streamlining, and I love to declutter. I was all in on Marie Kondo, and by all in, I mean, I actually did what she says to do, which is, you know, gather all of your stuff in one pile, all like things together [00:03:00], and then you cull and cull and cull.

And I was not on board for the sort of ceremonial folding of every shirt. I think I went through that process a little bit and then got real with myself and was like, let's be honest, I'm just going to throw these in a drawer. I'm a fan of clearing space and having lots of visual room. You know, if my desk is clear, that helps me feel clear on the inside.

And I like to be able to put things away quickly so that I can straighten up quickly. And that usually means I can't be ultra precious about how I fold things or what kind of bin things go in, you know, everything has a home in my house and I like to put things away at the end of the day and throughout the day.

But yeah, I was not on board for the Marie Kondo sort of really taking your time with every particular item and object. And although I appreciate [00:04:00] the philosophy behind that and the idea that if you slow down and give full attention to any one thing in your environment, you can appreciate the richness of your whole environment, right?

So much of our drive to consume is coming from a place of focusing on what we don't have, as opposed to focusing our attention on what we do have. And I think if there was more general reverence and time taken to appreciate the things we already have, then there would be probably less drive to get more. Although we're not just driving to get more because, you know, there's some organic urge to that, but I also think a lot of it is we're taught, we're conditioned, we're messaged, blah, blah, blah, to get more, to fix ourselves. So all of this is to say, I love a good declutter. I declutter my house on a regular basis. I also try and be very mindful about what I bring in.

Although I think [00:05:00] you know, I buy things that I wind up realizing later I couldn't use the way I thought I could, or it didn't really work for what I needed it for. Yeah, I try to be mindful in my consumption, in my spending, especially in my spending and in bringing stuff into the house.

I'm just not a fan of stuff, and we live in a pretty small house. I mean, it feels very spacious to me, but you know, it's not like we have the luxury of just dumping things in a garage that we never look at, and I'm glad. One of my main arguments to stay where we are is that I don't think we need more space just to fill it. I think if we're gonna have more space, then that's just gonna require additional discipline and removal of things and putting some mental boundaries in place around what we bring in and being conscious of the fact that just because you have square footage, does it mean you need to fill it?

Right? Anyway, the thing I want to talk to you about today is [00:06:00] how you can declutter your brain. How can you give yourself that feeling that comes with, for me, the feeling of a clean, clear, open desk? I work at what is essentially a drafting table, so it's a big white desk. I love it. It's huge. I love that it's white.

I love that I get natural light in my office and I can just have space to have a plant and a candle and a little, you know, like a sign or picture: things that make me happy. I also then can have room to work if I need it. And even more importantly, I can have nothing in my view, which makes me so happy in my eyesight, but there's nothing.

So to me, that is the purpose of a good declutter. It's to give you a feeling of peace. Decluttering should allow you to feel less stressed. And not everyone is like me. Our brains all work in very different ways. And [00:07:00] my brain is one that if I just clear physical space, I instantly feel calmer. For some people that is actually anxiety-producing because then they don't know where things are or they kind of can't feel calm unless they could see everything.

Right. So I recognize that, right. With what I'm sharing today, as with everything on this podcast, as I hope with everything in your professional and personal development, you will take what works for you, and you will leave the rest because that is the only point of any of what I'm talking about on this podcast, which is do what works for you.

So having said all that, if you know that your brain is overly full and you would like to declutter, I'm going to give you three specific strategies you can implement to do that. You don't have to do all these at once. You can do them in any order, for any amount. If you love decluttering like I do, you may find it extremely satisfying to go through each of these three things as an [00:08:00] exercise.

You know, exercise as discrete exercises: exercise one, exercise two, exercise three. You might love that. Or you might just say, okay, well, I'm listening to this podcast while I'm driving or while I'm walking or while I'm washing the dishes and I don't have time to pull out. I'm not going to make an assignment for myself to pull out a notebook.

So you just consider when you stop listening to me, okay, what is the one action item you're going to take away from this? What is one way you're going to declutter something from your brain? What jumps out in this to you that you can implement right away and easily. Because I think when we're feeling overwhelmed, you may have an extra tendency to be like, I should do all of this.

Which could be part of why, and I will get to this in a little bit, part of why you may feel like declutter is because you got too many "shoulds" piled up in there. Don't take any of this as a you should do all of these, and you've failed if you haven't done all of them, or that you can't be at peace if you don't do them all.

Just do one thing. One thing is better than no [00:09:00] things, right? One is better than none. One is better than no things. So here, let's start with something

pretty simple, pretty straightforward, which is the media you are consuming. What I mean specifically, is the television you're watching, the radio you're listening to, the podcasts you're imbibing, and the social media and newsletter accounts that you subscribe to.

Now look, if you get a lot of value out of this podcast, if you get a lot of value out of my newsletter if you're on my newsletter list, and you totally should be, if you like what I talk about. It should be in the show notes if you want to jump on the list. Cause I'm always putting out stuff there that is practical and hands-on and I think really will make your working life better.

So come hop in and see if you like it. The water's great. So I hope, what you're listening to now and whatever media you get from me is genuinely a value add to your [00:10:00] life. And if it's not, cut it out. And that goes for everything you consume. Every email you get. Every newsletter you subscribe to, every social media account you follow, every news program, every minute of news, every minute of sitcom, every minute of reality TV or true crime, whatever.

Whatever it is that you're consuming in terms of media, you get to declutter the inputs based on what actually serves you as opposed to what you've just gathered and collected over time. And now you might be saying, well, listen, my head feels cluttered all the time, not just when I'm looking at social media or not just when I'm listening to the news and I hear you.

But I would argue that what we fill our brains with when we are chilling out, when we're [00:11:00] relaxing, when we're taking a break, the inputs, that we're stuffing our brains full of creates a sort of static. It creates a sort of noise. It doesn't just go away because you're no longer listening to the podcast or you're no longer looking at a particular meme on social media, right?

Like, that stuff lingers in your brain, even if you're not conscious of it. And it's noise. It's just noise unless it serves you. So the question you can ask yourself in order to start decluttering your various accounts is this one question that I love. Love this question.

Is this useful? Is this useful? Is this useful to me? To who I am today? To what I want to achieve and who I want to be [00:12:00] and how I want to feel. Much more simply put, is this useful?

You may quickly realize, Oh, okay, well, I can immediately think of some things that aren't useful, right? Like, there was a time where I subscribed to a lot of social media analytics newsletter accounts. And listen, I am not paying attention to social media analytics. I mean, I'm aware of them, and I occasionally check in on them, and bless my intern who is keeping track of this stuff for me, but generally it's not my area of expertise.

It's not something I'm interested in. It's not anything I help my clients with. It's not an area of personal development. It's just noise. So unsubscribing to all of that stuff was an easy yes for me, easy, right? Like this is not useful to me. You will

probably have some accounts or stuff that you imbibe just because you've kind of collected it over the years, and it's still hanging out. Just let it go.

If it's not [00:13:00] useful to who you are now, let it go. Then you're going to find it gets a little trickier after that. It's sort of like saying, oh, look, we can compare it. We could compare the decluttering your brain process to decluttering a closet. If you were to say, okay, I have a pair of pants from middle school when I was a size eight or not eight.

What could I have possibly been? What's littler than eight? I don't even know. I wear like a size 14 now. I don't even, I'm not sure. So whatever. I guess eight is actually, I have worn a size eight in adulthood. But it's been a long time. Long story short, let's say you have a tutu from your ballet class that you did in middle school and you haven't done ballet since middle school.

You're never going to do ballet again and even if you did, you wouldn't wear a tutu made for a middle schooler because you're no longer in middle school. You don't fit that size anymore, right? Like, that would be a no-brainer. [00:14:00] You've outgrown that. It is no longer useful to you unless you want to wear it on your head as part of a costume and you keep a costume box. We keep costume boxes. I keep a costume box. Growing up, we always had costume boxes because my sister and I took dance classes. And so we had this amazing array of costumes, including tutus, but that's neither here nor there.

The point is that when you ask this question, is this useful? Some stuff is obviously not useful to you anymore.

Obviously, you've outgrown it, but then there's going to be other stuff that feels like oh, well, this should be useful or this could be useful. And let me break this down because this is going to be a recurring pattern in all of the decluttering work that we talk about. And it's the same as true for clearing out your clothes closet, for clearing out your junk drawer, for clearing out your garage, whatever.

The could and the should. I could use this one day: future. I should use this one day: obligation. Both of [00:15:00] these could and shoulds are going to weigh you down and fill up your brain with stuff you don't need. This is where a lot of the decluttering can happen if you're willing to let go. Now you may be like, I can't possibly stop collecting, I don't know, like urban gardening.

Videos on TikTok because I really want to start a garden one day. It's not a should, it's a could that's backed by this dream, right? It's not who I am today. I don't have a garden today. But I'm not going to stop following these accounts because one day, I could start a garden.

Well, here's what I want to offer you. This is where the question "is it useful" can be very useful. If it's useful to you to scroll past gardening because just watching other people do it brings you a sense of peace. It makes you feel like you're out in nature. It gives you a feeling of [00:16:00] relaxation.

It serves you in the moment, even if you never started a garden. Like, let's imagine you will never start a garden. Be who you are now, right? Don't collect stuff for the person that you think you should be or that you could be. Collect for the person that you are.

And I want to make an aside, which is like the world of mindset coaching will teach you that this isn't always a useful path to walk down, right? Like you don't always want to limit yourself to who you are now. Because if you're actively in the process of creating a different version of yourself, then you don't want to only surround yourself with the things that are relevant to who you are currently.

Okay, having acknowledged that, if you have a clutter problem, a media clutter problem, and you know it, the really easy way to tell if you should keep something or toss it in your social media feed and your newsletter, whatever [00:17:00] is, how does it make you feel as soon as you see it? What is your immediate reaction to that thing?

Does it make you happy? Does it give you energy? Does it make you inspired? Does it bring you calm? Is it a sweet sigh of relief or happiness or tenderness or joy? If it gives you positive sensations to experience it, then keep it. Why not? My god, there's no limit to how many people you follow or how many emails you get.

You don't have to limit yourself. But if it stresses you out or if it feels like something you're just bookmarking so that one day you can come back to it, and you have no idea when that day will be. And if you're really honest with yourself, it's probably not going to be for like five years. Or ten years.

Or, let's be honest, retirement. Because you're not gonna start an urban garden with chickens now. You're gonna have to wait until you move to a place with a real backyard, and you know what I [00:18:00] mean. You know what I'm saying. Like, if the account that you're following or the newsletter you're receiving or the media you're watching makes you feel pressure, then you gotta get rid of it. It's kind of the simplest way. Does it bring you pleasure or does it give you pressure? The whole point of decluttering is to make yourself feel less pressure. So if the urban gardening stuff is a could that brings you great joy to just look at, even if you never do, it's not about changing yourself to match the feed.

It's just about enjoying what's in front of you today. Keep it. If every time it pops up, you get this feeling of, ugh, I really should go to Home Depot this weekend and finally build out that box garden. And you know full well, you're not going to do that, but you've got a should weighing on you. I say, let it go.

And here's the thing. I want to give credit to Marie Kondo, but it may not have been her. It may have been some other person when I was deep in the [00:19:00] condoing of my house, something I read somewhere that just resonated for me so much. I thought it was so useful. It was this idea that, and this was related to books specifically.

You know, I am a writer. Many years of practice as a writer. Before I was a writer, I was an avid reader. I still love to read. I feel like I trade in words. Books are a thing for me. I still don't have the massive libraries that many writers and readers have. However, I used to have way more books than I have now.

And this idea that I came across years ago, was so helpful for me with books, and with decluttering in all ways, that I would encourage you to try it on as a concept while you think about decluttering your brain and decluttering your social media feeds and your news feeds and all that stuff is this idea.

If I really care about this, will it be worth it to me to come back and look this up again? The [00:20:00] example of a book is, if I got rid of this book, would I want to buy it again? And that's such a great question, right? Would you buy it? Would you check it out of the library, maybe? Or maybe would you never think about that book again, because it just represents a version of you that you would like to be.

I'd like to be the person who reads Ulysses, for example. I was an English major. Somehow I got through being an English major at a fairly prestigious college without having to read Ulysses, like, whew! I don't like Joyce. I don't care. I don't want to have to read that book. Some people love it. I couldn't care less, and if I had that book on my shelf, it would have purely been a testament to the fact that I thought I should be someone who should read Ulysses or I want other people who come to my house to think that I'm the kind of person who might read Ulysses one day.

Well, forget it! I don't care. If you come to my house and you judge me based on my bookshelf, I have bigger problems in my [00:21:00] personal relationships. You should know what you're getting when you come to hang out with me. And you shouldn't be shocked by my bookcase. And just that one question is so useful.

And so I think social media can be similar. Decluttering your social media can be similar. Decluttering what you're watching on TV and what you're listening to can be similar. I often will advise clients to stop watching so much news if they're feeling especially overburdened and stressed and anxious, because it's not that being uninformed is good.

It's that being mindful about how the things you put into your brain make you feel is important. You need to know how constantly listening to negative, scary, threatening stories impacts your energy and your emotional state and your mental health. It's not good for you. So if you don't [00:22:00] have the reserves, the sense of self-esteem, the compassion, the energy to handle it, then listening to it is only going to get in the way of you doing the things that you need to do, which is attend to your mental health.

Take care of the basic functions that you need to take care of as a partner and parent and worker and community member and like a good steward of planet earth. Like you don't need to feel like shit to show up and make a positive difference in every area of your life. And if what you're watching or what you're

listening to or what you're reading makes you feel terrible about yourself, about the world. If it beats you down, then listen, you're just not in a place where you have the bandwidth to consume that right now.

So get it [00:23:00] off, get it off your newsfeed, turn it off the television, turn off the radio, stop listening, tune out, and put your focus back where it needs to be, which is on building yourself up so that you have the capacity to consume that stuff. And I would also say this is true for a lot of political and social activism.

And I say that because, I'm one of those well-meaning white women who it took Nazi rally and death in Charlottesville where I live for me to understand and finally get what white supremacy is, how it works, what anti-racism is, like how it's not a matter of some white people are good and some white people are bad and whatever.

Like, I'm one of those people who's relatively newly woke, okay? And I've always been, I've always considered myself [00:24:00] a bleeding heart liberal, but I just haven't had the understanding of what the systems at play in our world, because it had my white privilege and my white fragility sort of twin forces, keeping all that stuff at bay.

And here's the thing. When I started learning about that for months, I couldn't read more than like three paragraphs in an article from an activist or a teacher without kind of going down a path of self-hatred and self-loathing. And again, I think one of the reasons that white supremacy has such a chokehold, especially on white women, is that there's this othering that happens of like, well, if I'm participating in white supremacy, then I should be ashamed of myself. And that shame is like, only terrible people are racist.

Only the worst of humanity. You know, like, that's kind of what I was taught, is like, You're a loathsome person if you participate in the oppression of [00:25:00] others. But the reality is, and I think all of us in different ways have participated in the oppression of others. It's not that black and white.

It's just not. So all of that is to say I didn't have the emotional bandwidth and the self-compassion to really learn that stuff with any great depth or tenacity. When I first began to understand it, I had to do a lot of inner work with mentors to get to a point that I could even learn about it without going into a nervous system shutdown response.

You can't learn when your prefrontal cortex is offline and when you're totally in fight or flight, in like deep self-loathing like that, and like horror, that's not a place that you can learn and grow from. It just isn't. So anyway, all of that is to say: that's my personal example of why sometimes there may be accounts or media that you consume that you want to follow [00:26:00] that you're like I really should follow this, but now is not the time

Because this is not useful to me now. I can't make use of this now. And it's a subtlety, right? Like, I'm not advocating that you just bury your head in the sand

and you never pay attention to what's going on in the world, and you live in a bubble, and you turn a blind eye to suffering in the world. Like that's not, I'm not advocating that, but I am advocating the self-awareness and intelligence to be able to modulate and moderate what you consume based on how it impacts you and how it impacts your ability to show up and create the kind of difference you want to create in the world. That was a lot of talking about how to get really clear on what you want to declutter, and I've been talking about social media, podcasts, radio, basically all these inputs that we consume, media from others that we consume as opposed to the stuff we create.

There's like consumerism [00:27:00] and creation, right? So what are you consuming? But, all of these examples I'm giving, you know, ditching the could's, ditching the should's, keeping the things that we consume really serves you and gives you a sense of pleasure and energy and inspiration and motivation and hope that philosophy overall applies to all the categories I'm going to suggest, all these three places where you could declutter. So, the rest of this is probably going to go pretty fast. The first place or a place you can start is just the next time you're on your phone and you're scrolling, notice what accounts you may be following that you want to unfollow because it just doesn't make you feel good or because it's old news.

You know, if it was a piece of clothing in your closet, could you honestly say that you'd worn it in the last year? I love that question, right? Maybe put something in a bag and put it in the closet or attic or whatever for a year. And if you don't miss it, it's time to donate, you know? [00:28:00] So that's one example.

That's one area that I think if you focus on decluttering your inputs, it will really clear out your brain all day long. Not just when you're looking at your social media. Not just when you're consuming media. It'll decrease the noise. The next area I want to talk about is decluttering in your relationships, and in your relationship dynamics.

Now, this could be its own podcast episode. I'm not going to get into that in a huge, huge way. But as far as it goes, as far as we're talking about decluttering your brain, I want to acknowledge that a lot of what weighs on people's brains is a feeling of obligation and a sort of resentful responsibility to others.

And you know, feeling like, "oh, I owe something to someone", or "I should do X, Y, and Z for this person", or "I'm a bad friend because I haven't followed up with so and so", or "I'm a [00:29:00] terrible son because I haven't watered it enough." Like there can often be this layer of self-recrimination and judgment and a feel heavy feeling of obligation that fills your brain with, with sort of this panicky static.

Because the idea here, right, is if you're a bad person because you're "failing certain relationships", if that's how you talk to yourself if that's what a feeling of obligation does to you, then you're going to be carrying a lot of extra emotional weight that's going to fog up your brain and make it hard for you to just be present in the moment and focus on whatever you're focusing on.

This is true in general, but it's also specifically true to these examples I'm talking about. If you feel like you're a bad person, unless you do X, Y, or Z, then you will do other stuff. [00:30:00] You'll do A, B, and C, not X, Y, and Z. Because you're trying to escape the feeling of being a bad person, and therefore the feeling of being a bad person never goes away.

You're just always running from it, or maybe you tackle one thing. Maybe you make one phone call, you write one card, or you send one text, and then you're like whew, now I'm not a bad person, but only marginally am I less bad. And then you go back to carrying this heavy burden. I don't want that for you.

I don't want that for anyone. I don't want people to be in my life because they feel a heavy weight of obligation and responsibility to me. And that's the only reason they're showing up. This is not a good place. It's like, don't RSVP to a party that you don't want to go to because you think you should.

Unless you're pushing yourself, like, and I mean, I can think of a social party. There are times I think you should push yourself to go to certain parties you may not want to go to simply because it's going to grow and stretch you professionally or be part of some personal development plan you have, right?

[00:31:00] But I would say generally, if you get invited to a party, and you're like, I don't like this person, but they're my child's best friend's family member. And if I don't go, then I'm worried there's going to be some backlash and blah, blah, blah, blah. And like my child should really fit in. So I'm going to do all these layers of responsibility.

How about no, how about you just don't, how about you just let it go? Now I recognize that this is a complicated topic. This could be a much bigger, like I said, a much longer podcast episode could be standalone thing for the purposes of decluttering some of these feelings of obligation that you may be carrying.

When you think about the people who are on your list, folks you need to attend to for some reason or another, if you're really honest about what they bring into your life and what you get out of interacting with them and participating in their life, when you think about that exchange, think about if it's an energy drain or an energy infusion.

Does interfacing with this [00:32:00] person drain you? Or does it make you happy, and you just haven't made time for it? Are you experiencing pleasure when you interface with this person? Or are you experiencing pain? But if you're experiencing pain, why? Now, I mean, there are complicated relationships that we all have that may be painful for various reasons.

And we choose to maintain those relationships and work with and around and through the pain because it's worthwhile to us. And only you can make that distinction and decision. But generally, I think there is probably a short list, or maybe even a long list of people where you feel an obligation to be more responsive.

Or to get back to someone faster, or some sense of false urgency that only exists because you're not being honest with yourself about what the relationship does for you. And you know, sometimes here's the thing, I think there are some people who you may have a relationship with [00:33:00] because you genuinely love.

It's not that they even support you that much, it's that you like how it feels to support them.

And again, it just goes back to this question of what is the reality of the energy dynamic in this relationship for me? And do I need to feel so beholden to this person? Also, is there a layer of self-criticism or self-judgment at play that is underpinning this feeling of urgency or obligation. Because generally, I would say if you feel a heavy sense of obligation, then it's coming from one of two places.

It's a relationship you're maintaining that you don't really want to maintain, or you know you want to maintain it and you have unresolved issues that you need to work through about that relationship. And in the latter case, you can ask for professional help, right? You can avail yourself of resources that can support you in navigating those difficult relationships.

There's a lot of work you could do to heal relationships that may be difficult for some [00:34:00] reason. But there are also relationships that are just dysfunctional that you don't need to participate in that maybe you've been blindly telling yourself you have to be a part of because society says you should or your fears say you should.

I want you to free yourself from those. I want you to be like, it's okay if I don't respond to this text because it's going to be bad for me. Again, this isn't useful. This won't be useful to me right now. I don't have the bandwidth for it. I'm not going to do it. So, simplifying and decluttering these obligations that come from relationships.

That is another important area to tackle if you're decluttering your brain. The last piece that I'll talk about today, I could probably come up with about 20 ways you could declutter your brain. But the third way I'll talk about for today is how you can simplify your focus and therefore declutter your brain by [00:35:00] essentially not splitting your attention into so many different avenues.

So what do I mean when I say simplify your focus? What I mean is if you're looking at a computer screen, how many tabs do you have opened? Pretty straightforward, right? If you're like me, most days you have a thousand tabs opened, and then you check yourself and you're like, wait a second. I have to do this with myself.

I did this before I started recording this podcast. I was like, wait a second. I do not need three email inboxes and an article about the recipe I cooked for dinner and another thing about some project I want to work on tomorrow, like, I don't need any of that. All I need in front of me is the notes I have for this episode and the recording equipment.

That's all I need because that's what I'm doing right now. And closing tabs is a wonderful, physical, I mean it's digital, but you know what I mean, like a physical click way that you can declutter your brain. A good [00:36:00] filter for deciding am I trying to do too much? Is there too much that I'm focused on right now?

Is this little bit of this science based factoid, which is our brains work? Our brains process information at such a rate that we can barely maintain two conversations at once. Not even maintain conversations, listen to two conversations at once. We can barely do that. So if you think about each tab as something asking for your attention, it's like a mini conversation that's being thrown at you.

So, how many tabs should you have open? Right? Now you may say, "oh, I just don't even see those tabs. I don't even notice them." No, your brain is having to work to remove those tabs from your visual field. I'm talking about tabs right now on like an internet browser, but this also applies to your to-do list.[00:37:00]

This applies to physical folders. This applies to what you have planned to do for your week. It applies to your quarterly goals or your annual goals. It applies to your aspirations for any one day. What do I want to get done today? I'm not saying you can only get two things done in a day. I'm saying you can only focus max on two things at once.

Anything more than that is going to create a cognitive drain on your brain. It will literally sap you of energy. It will literally sap you of brain power. It's like the nutrients in your brain will be siphoned off just because you are task-switching. And not only that, when you switch tasks, you lose brain power.

There's like an up, uptake time.

So, the way my brain works, and I feel like I'm quasi-neurodivergent, who knows, I'm on the spectrum like everyone else. We all have spectrums that our brains are on, right? Some of us are labeled neurotypical, some of us are labeled neurodivergent. To me, it's not [00:38:00] relevant, at this phase in my life, for me to pursue any kind of further classification than how I know my brain functions best.

But for my brain, one thing that gives me great energy and pleasure is bouncing around between projects. I actually love that. I love bouncing around between projects. But in a case like this, recording this podcast episode, here's the reality. This episode is like a bunch of different mini-projects inside of it, right?

I mean, I've got an outline here that is, it's only like five items long, but look, I've been talking for almost 40, 45 minutes now, nonstop. Like I'm bouncing around from idea to idea here. And that brings me great energy and great pleasure. So, I don't need to also have multiple tabs open. Because I'm getting that little hit of pleasure of bouncing around from thing to thing.

And so if you just remember that the limit of your brain [00:39:00] is that you can only sustain listening to two conversations at once, that is like max, that is completely draining your tank. Use that metric to decide if you're taking on too much at any one time. Is what's in front of you the equivalent of three conversations coming at you?

It's too much. Frankly, it's probably too much if it's two conversations because that's going to bleed you totally dry. Now, I have gone into great detail on my blog and in my newsletter. And again, the second plug for the newsletter, you should join it if you're not already on it. I've gone into great detail about how you can create a more efficient and self-supporting to-do list, and how you can stop trying to essentially take on too much with your project management.

I've written about all of this stuff at great length, so I'm not going to go into great length about it here, but again, there's plenty I could say. What I just want to say for now is that use that [00:40:00] metric of two conversations. And if you find that there are the equivalent of four conversations happening, either on your to-do list, and I mean to-do list for over the next like hour, your to-do list over the next, you know, whatever, before your next meeting, 25 minutes before your next meeting, your to-do list for the week doesn't feel like the equivalent of two conversations.

It feels like the equivalent of like 14 conversations. There are a couple of ways you can handle this. And the main thing for me that works best is to do a brain dump. And again, I've written a lot about this, but basically, I'm always generating ideas. I always have more stuff I want to do. I always have projects that I could be working on that the idea of it just brings me pleasure.

And then of course there are things I have to do, right? So there's always more to do. I'm sure that's true for you too. But rather than try and focus on 14 things at once, or even four things at once, I dump [00:41:00] that stuff. I dump it out of my brain onto a piece of paper or a digital file. I use the notes app on my phone.

I have a running to-do list. It's never done. I don't expect it to be done. It's just the place I go and I dump stuff I need to do at some point I would like to do at some point. There's obviously more nuance to it than that, but basically if you have 14 tabs open, I want to ask you, what is it you think will happen if you close the majority of those tabs?

Do you think you won't be able to find those links again? Is that why they're open? Because if that's the case, you can create a single Google Doc where you copy and paste all of the links so that you can come back and get them. Or if you use Pinterest, you could add it to Pinterest or however you organize your notes for yourself.

You don't have to be looking at everything at once unless you know that's how your brain works best, right? But for me, it is an absolutely terrible idea [00:42:00] to try and look at everything at once.

The only way I can have the pleasure of bouncing from project to project, like, I worked on six different projects this afternoon, over the course of about three hours. And the reason that worked for me is because I had everything. I had each of the projects written down. I knew what kind of my next step was in each of those projects. I didn't have a time limit and it's not like anything was urgent and had to be done.

You know, I had already handled the stuff that had to be done. So I could just mess around and I could basically go from one to another to another. But I only did that for probably 10 or 15 minutes before I was like, okay, that's enough. I'm worn out from this. I got my little hit of the fun of bouncing around, and now I'm tired, I've got to focus on like one or two things.

So that's my suggestion for you. Think about how you can minimize what you're focused on or what you're looking at or what your brain is holding at any given time. And if you're stressed that you're not going to be able to get something back, then come up with [00:43:00] a really simple way that you can retrieve what you need when the time comes.

Right? You don't have to have everything open at once. It is totally possible to organize your files, to organize your thoughts in such a simple way that you have one note on your phone that you go to. Oh, there's the whole list. Or, oh, I have one place on my computer where I keep all of the projects I mean to attend to that I know I'm probably not going to get to this week or even this month.

Like, you can keep it really simple for yourself, and that's my recommendation, that you just make it easy, but allow your focus to be very clear and very straightforward so that you're not overwhelming your brain, so that you declutter it. You literally declutter it by asking it to do less. So to recap, very quickly, those are the three areas I'll suggest you declutter.

Declutter your media feed. Declutter your obligations and declutter your [00:44:00] focus. What's on the agenda to get done tonight? Okay.

I hope this was helpful. I am wishing you a decluttered brain, lots of freedom and peace of mind. And I will talk to you soon.

Thank you for tuning in. I hope today's show helps you remember that every day can be extraordinary and that you, my friend, already are. If today's episode was inspiring or useful to you, hit subscribe so you don't miss an episode. If you want to go deeper, you can hire me as your private coach or as a workshop leader for your organization.

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