

# FINDING YOUR CREATIVE FOCUS

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*A brief worksheet to help you discover your creative goals and what you can about them on a regular basis.*

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**Before we get started, just a quick FYI:**

**You're awesome.**

One

## **VISION & VALUES**

*To start, let's think through what you value and what the vision for your life looks like. You'll use this as a compass for helping to figure out where best to spend your time and energy related to your creative work and your personal life.*

### **Meaningful Productivity**

Before we get in to goals, priorities, and focus, we've got to start with the foundations. Let's start by debunking what "productivity" is and is not...

### **Productivity Isn't Just for Business-y Stuff**

We often reward effective busywork while giving little dignity to meaningful work. Which is why you need define productivity differently. With less of a focus on our party trick of balancing many plates at once, and more of a focus on your ability to consistently give your time and attention to the things which are most important.

### **Productivity is Not Primarily About Efficiency**

Productivity, in and of itself, is just a metric for efficiency. Yes, efficiency is awesome. But what's more awesome is spending your time on the right things. Rather than concerning yourself with tips and tricks, you should make sure you're actually spending your time well in the first place.

### **Meaningful Productivity Thrives on Deep Work, Focused Attention, and Relationships**

More often than not, your best work is accomplished during times when you are in *the zone*. Or as Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi says, when you are in a state of flow. Focused work, looks like an hour or more of single tasking. Practicing a musical instrument. Practicing a physical activity. Writing. Painting. Planning and architecting. Coding. Designing. Etc. Shallow work, looks like email correspondence, administrative tasks, errands, etc. Don't pit deep work and shallow work against one another. Because they're both important in their own right. However, neither should you replace the former with the latter (as the latter is wont to do).

### **Meaningful Productivity is a Byproduct of Clarity**

You can't spend your time doing work that matters if you don't know what matters in the first place. It is of the utmost importance that you have clarity about who you are, what your values are, your vision for life, what's important, and what you can do every day to stay steady in your aim of doing your best creative work.

### **You Have to Start With Meaning**

If true (Meaningful) Productivity is doing that which is most important, then it means that productivity is not ultimately based on efficiency, but rather vision and values. This is why having a life vision and life goals is so powerful. With them, you can define what it looks like to actually be productive (not just busy).

The foundation of meaningful productivity is having values (or purpose), vision (or priorities), and the personal integrity to walk them out.



## Two

# GOALS & PRIORITIES

*Next, we'll aim to get clarity about how you are spending your time, where you are focusing your energy, how to overcome a feeling of overwhelm, and how to make consistent progress on your big goals.*

### How To Prioritize

If you are waiting to move forward until you know exactly the right direction, you're probably doing it wrong. Action brings clarity. So, start right away, and then allow your day-to-day experiences give you the clarity and direction you need. You'll never get through one of those life-sized mazes by staring at the entrance. Get in there, start walking around, and you'll find your way to the finish line.

- Do something every day that will move the needle forward. Refuse to be paralyzed by indecision.
- Optimize what has already worked. Instead of wondering if you should move on to the new shiny thingamajig, focus on strengthening what you have right now.
- Listen to the ideas that don't let go. If there's one idea you seem to keep coming back to — one thing that is the first thing that pops into your mind when you wake up — focus on that.
- Have fun!
- What's valuable to others? If you're just not sure, focus on what will make you money. Because when you seek to make money you're actually seeking to provide value to others. Money is simply a neutral indicator of value.
- Ask your audience / customers / clients what they're challenged by, and then seek to solve their problems.
- Find help, mentorship, community, and/or accountability.

### Time Management

*"Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that's the stuff life's made of."*

— Benjamin Franklin

A schedule is little more than a plan of attack for when you're going to do all the things you love and that are most important to you. What a schedule does is free you from having to make emotionally-driven judgment calls throughout the day. If you've planned ahead of time what you're going to be doing and when, all that's left to do is follow your schedule. For the creative person, a "schedule" may seem like kryptonite. But in truth, a plan for how you're going to spend your time is quite liberating.

### Urgent vs. Important

To live our lives giving attention only to that which is urgent, is to live like a child. With a foundation of "meaningful productivity", you can focus on the important work. Giving yourself permission to muse, think, come up with ideas, and just breathe. Knowing that that which is urgent will always find us.

*"If you take care of important things, the urgent things don't show up as often. The opposite is never true."*

— Seth Godin

# SETTING SOME GOALS & PRIORITIES

*More fun than it sounds!*

## **1. List two creative / entrepreneurial / awesome people with a body of work that you admire.**

*Recognizing those you look up to who are a few steps ahead of you can help you get clarity about where you want to go next.*

## **2. List two creative goals you have for yourself this year.**

*Such as: get better at Illustrator; land my first consulting client; take more photographs; come up with more bad ideas; write every day; etc.*

## **3. Think of an area in your life you can automate, delegate, or eliminate which will give space in your day to work on one of your creative goals.**

*Extra credit if you challenge your assumptions: could you watch less Netflix? Hire a house cleaner? Work from home one day a week to save time on your commute? Make a week's worth of breakfast burritos all on Sunday afternoon?*

Three

## **INTENTIONAL PRACTICE (A.K.A. “THE ZONE”)**

*Now that you know what’s important to you and what your goals are, we’re going to figure out how best to spend your time in order to focus on your creative work. Learn what Intentional Practice looks like and how to create the time for it on a regular basis.*

### **Deep Work and The Note**

As mentioned earlier, our best creative work is accomplished during times when we are in the zone. In his book, *Deep Work*, Cal Newport writes that *“the ability to perform deep work is becoming increasingly rare at exactly the same time it is becoming increasingly valuable in our economy. As a consequence, the few who cultivate this skill, and then make it the core of their working life, will thrive.”*

If you want to do your best creative work, you’ve got to show up every day. But showing up is just half of it. You also need to make sure the work you are doing is challenging to your creative skills and is moving you forward to attain your creative goals.

For me, I spend two hours every morning writing. This is my focused, deep work time. And, to make sure I get the most out of it, I leave a note out for myself at the end of each day. On that note I write the topic for tomorrow’s writing. This way, when my writing time comes, I already know exactly what it is I need to write about. My only job is to sit down and write.

### **Resting Well**

Albert Einstein said: *“Although I have a regular work schedule, I take time to go for long walks on the beach so that I can listen to what is going on inside my head. If my work isn’t going well, I lie down in the middle of a workday and gaze at the ceiling while I listen and visualize what goes on in my imagination.”*

Rest, as an activity, should leave us feeling recharged and re-energized. I for one never feel charged up and energized after a 5-hour Netflix binge session. Neither do I feel energized after 2 hours of passively scrolling my Twitter timeline. If the goal of resting is to be recharged and re-energized, what then can we do that will leave us with more energy than we started?

Consider: reading, encouraging and serving others, physical activity, quality time with friends, focusing on a challenging task and making progress, being quiet.

### **Community**

Relationships are critical to your happiness. Thus, they are also critical to your success. The right relationships will help you stay on track. Relationships help you learn and teach. If you want to do work that matters, it takes gusto. It’s risky. It’s hard! It can also be lonely. It’s far easier to take risks and try new things when you’re surrounded by others who are doing the same thing.

# CHOOSING A DEEP WORK FOCUS

*Let's get in the zone!*

## 1. What is a deep work activity you could do on a regular basis?

*Something that will:*

- (a) Align with your vision and values from Section One (page 4)*
- (b) Help you develop your creative skill set*
- (c) Help you accomplish your creative goal from Session Two*

*Pro Tip: Schedule your deep work activity (aim for 5, one-hour sessions per week)*

## 2. What is a "deep work fuel" you could cultivate? Something that will help you stay focused and motivated?

*Such as: community, accountability, margin in your schedule, quitting social media, less television, etc.*



# SUPER AWESOME RESOURCES & STUFF

## The Elements of Focus

This is a free, 10-day video class, taught by yours truly (Shawn Blanc).

The 3 main themes in The Elements of Focus are:

- **Time:** Make the most out of the time you have in the day
- **Clarity:** Get clarity on where you should be focusing your time and attention.
- **Traction:** Gain traction and momentum on your business or side project.

You can sign up for free: [thefocuscourse.com/freeclass](https://thefocuscourse.com/freeclass)

## Margin

Margin is breathing room. It's the opposite of overload.

Having breathing room in your schedule, finances, emotional energy, and mental energy is paramount. When you're at capacity, there is no room for anything else. But when there is space left over — when there is margin — that space enables you to breath. Margin enables you to do your best creative work. Margin enabled intentional living. Margin helps with stress and anxiety.

For a slew of articles, podcasts, and a spiffy video presentation, check out [thefocuscourse.com/margin](https://thefocuscourse.com/margin)

## Some Excellent Books

*Deep Work*, by Cal Newport

*The Crossroads of Should and Must*, by Elle Luna

*What To Do When It's Your Turn*, by Seth Godin

*Show Your Work*, by Austin Kleon