

## High-Performance Zone, Part 2

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As leaders, we enjoy taking on ambitious challenges, solving significant problems, and stretching ourselves. To be in what I call your high-performance zone as you take on the challenges of leadership, it's necessary to have a regular activity that helps you to clear your mind and that allows you to access the deeper knowledge you already have.

What percentage of your waking hours is scheduled? If you're anything like most leaders, it's probably greater than 80% of your time. Depending on how heavily we allow our time to be scheduled, during most, if not all, of our waking hours we are thinking; in other words, the deliberate operation of our conscious mind. Research has shown the processing power of our conscious mind to be quite limited. It is capable of perhaps five to six things it can process simultaneously. We are used to keeping it full with our thoughts, questions, and issues of the moment.

As leaders, our focus is on setting the course for the future on behalf of our organizations and those we lead, removing roadblocks, and forging ahead. To be effective leaders not only do we need to create a strong future for our organizations while keeping a steady grasp on the present, but we also need time to restore and revitalize our perspective on a daily basis. A proven way to do that is finding a "timeless activity" we can do every day and making it nonnegotiable on our calendar.

What do I mean by a timeless activity? I see it as having four distinct elements:

1. While you are doing it, you lose track of time.
2. It's easy to be in the moment. You are not thinking about or analyzing your world; you are simply "being."
3. You feel energized after you do it.
4. Generally, it's a solo activity.

I ask that my clients have a timeless activity on a daily basis, and they have quite a variety: daily running, walking on the beach, reading books, knitting, being of service to others, meditating, the treadmill, et cetera.

With such a premium on your time, why is this type of activity so important?

While our conscious mind is limited in processing-power, "the big computer" is the nonconscious mind. That's the part where we are not exerting deliberate control. It is responsible for the "heavy lifting" in terms of skill application, creativity, analysis, problem solving, and perception. In fact, a preponderance of the research on problem solving shows that the best way to solve a complex problem is *not* to think about it deliberately, but to put it aside and let it process, as they say, "in the back of your mind."

The research shows that putting a problem aside and letting it process nonconsciously works amazingly well. In simple terms, that's where the idea *Why don't you sleep on it?* comes from. When the answer, or "signal," is ready, how much of it you will be able to benefit from is directly proportional to the noise level in your conscious mind.

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Put simply, a daily timeless activity clears the connection between your conscious and nonconscious mind of the noise so that the results of all that superb processing, the signal, can be received at full strength. We get access to more information, and even nuance. It makes us more effective leaders.

Without clearing the “noise” from your conscious mind on a regular basis, the answers to your most important questions or solutions to critical issues have to fight to get your attention. If the problem or creative project is important enough to you, a simple version of the signal will squeeze through to your conscious mind unexpectedly. When you hear people say, “It was my intuition” or “I woke up with the answer,” it means they received only a fraction of the available information, probably because the connection was noisy—that is, the answer was calling, but the line was busy.

Personally, my timeless activity is daily meditation first thing in the morning when I’m still a little sleepy. The word *meditation* puts some people off, but it is so simple for me. I just sit in a comfortable chair, close my eyes, and clear my mind of thought. When I catch myself thinking, I clear my mind again. Sometimes I’m there for five minutes, and sometimes for 40. It’s over when it’s over, and it puts me in my high-performance zone for the day.

One way I use timeless activity in my coaching is to ask clients to pose a question to themselves before their timeless activity each day, for a few days in a row. With my client Lisa, who was trying to solve a particularly thorny business-development problem, we formulated a question together for her to pose to herself before her daily jog. She would clear her mind, put on her headphones, and run. I asked her to jot down anything that came to her when she got back home. Indeed, she received quite a bit of detail and came up with three potential approaches for dealing with the issue. They were all creative and well “*thought*” out.

There is a mountain of writing, thought, and spiritual tradition that says it’s important to be in the “now.” Most recently, Eckhardt Tolle’s work, especially his book *The Power of Now*, has been getting a lot of attention, and his guidance is wonderful. And certainly it’s a noble goal to live every moment *in* the now. It is the embodiment of the concept of presence. So consider this regular, timeless practice I’m recommending as establishing a beachhead in what I believe to be a very healthy life practice.

My invitation to you is to identify your timeless activity, whether it be hobby, exercise, sports, service, or meditation practice, and make sure you are truly clearing your mind during that time. Make a point of opening your mind to new information before you begin. The new ideas and answers will flow, and they will help you be in your own high-performance zone.