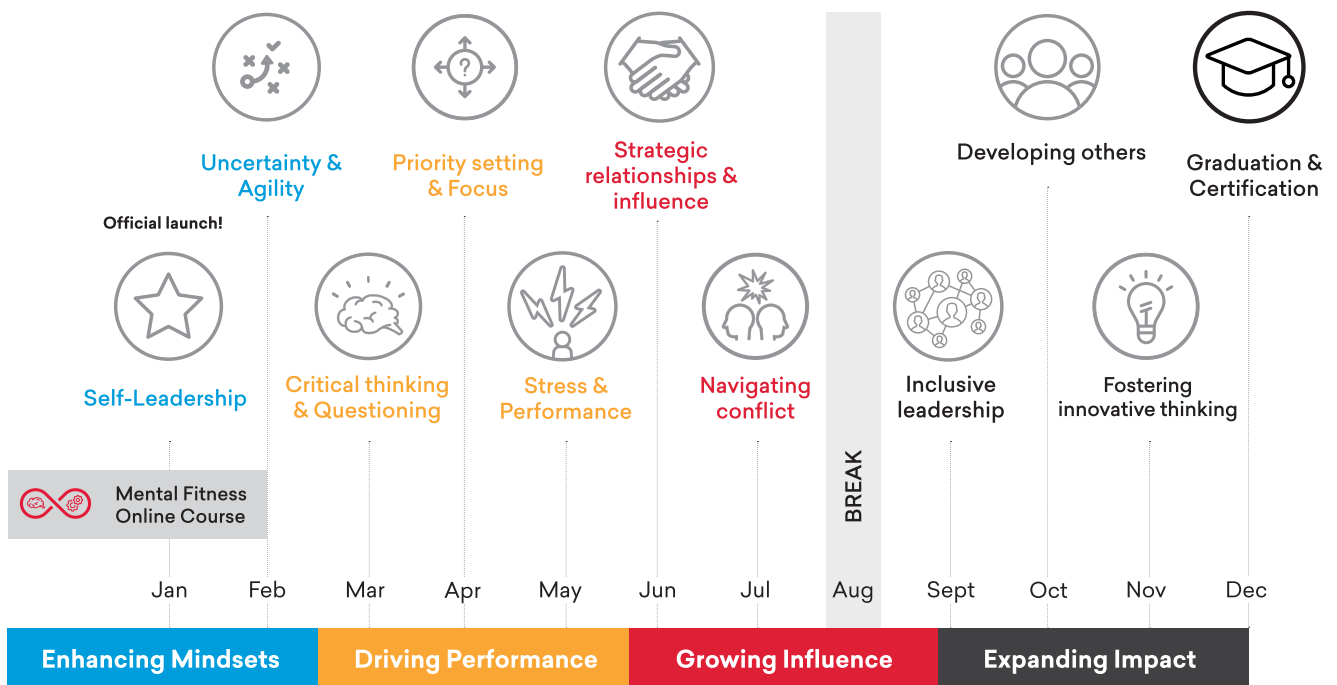


# The **EDGE**

## Welcome to The EDGE recap for zone 2

### Driving Performance

#### Session 4: Priority Setting & Focus



This module helps you understand what drives **motivation, momentum and productivity**. You'll enhance your ability to cut through the clutter of our always-on world with its endless urgencies and priorities. Why? Because the way to accomplish more isn't to do more—it's to do strategically less.

**Ready to get behind the wheel of your success? Hop into the driver's seat and crank up the engine—it's time to drive performance!**

# Driving performance



## Driving performance

### Critical Thinking and Questioning

Move from executing requests to uncovering the why that drives them

### Priority Setting and Focus

Gain clarity on what really matters and optimize your capacity

### Stress and Performance

Capitalize on positive stress and thrive in chaos

## Session 4: Priority Setting & Focus

**Date:** 14th April

**Trainer:** Kate Hickey

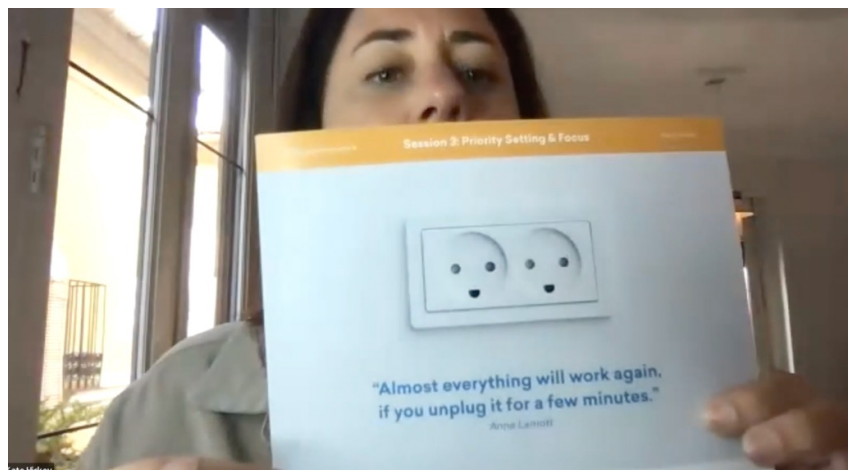
Priorities, priorities! We showed up to this session to proactively **manage our focus**. We loaded up on ways to **unload our workloads** so that we can step in the helicopter and **prioritise meaningfully**.

We didn't aim to turn everyone into a **Zen master** (though it's possible given your talents)—just to **move the needle** a little.

## A nudge

We kicked off with cue: Priority setting & focus need cultivating—they're muscles we flex and we need to keep them active. **Focus hygiene** is as key to our well-being as eating right, exercising, or spending intentional time with family and friends.

Sometimes that means powering down.



'Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes.'

# Defend your focus

Prioritisation starts with **intention!**

The time we spend upfront strategically discussing and **deciding on our priorities, planning our time & defending our focus** is directly correlated to our performance

What is **attention**? It is the brain's **capacity to prioritise** some information over other information.

## Attention: Our 3 Systems

**Definition of attention:** The brains capacity to prioritize some information over other information

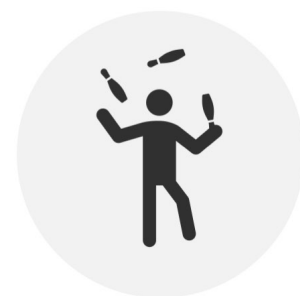
Flashlight



Floodlight



Juggler



Source: Dr. Amishi Jha

We have 3 systems for doing this:

**Flashlight:** Your ability to put direct intentional focus onto one thing.

## The Flashlight



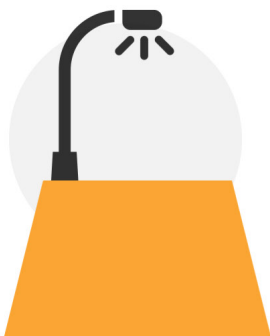
- Neurologically, we get crisper and clearer and higher integrity information when we privileging one thing. That quality of attention means higher quality understanding.
- Your Focus flashlight can be directed both internally and externally.
- Your focus is finite.
- In order to remember something you had to have paid attention to it. The first step to memory is focus.
- Your flashlight has batteries and the longer it's on and moving back and forth the quicker it will run out of energy

Source: Dr. Amishi Jha

shine it into the external world.

**Floodlight:** When you open your memory's receptors to take in all the things at once.

## The Floodlight



- This is the "Alerting and receptive system"
- Emergencies, alerts, someone yelling etc.
- This system is for for "What is happening right now?!"
- It puts us in a state of vigilance: We're not sure what we're looking for but we're looking for something.

Source: Dr. Amishi Jha

**Juggler:** The executive control system that course-corrects and directs you between the other 2 systems.

## The Juggler



- Also called the “Executive Control” system.
- This system can course correct, update the goals, manage obstacles, etc.
- The juggler can determine: What’s important to me right now? What are my goals? Are my actions in line with my goals? And then pivot.
- This system directs the other two systems.
- This system is most prone to fatigue. And multitasking is what usually drives this fatigue.
- Multitasking is a myth....it’s task switching

Source: Dr. Amishi Jha

## Breakout groups

**Question:** How are you navigating between the 3 types of attention?

*We asked this question to generate insights into how we can better focus our ‘flashlight’—especially during online conversations.*

*Some of us are overwhelmed by Netflix! And when we’re overwhelmed, we tend to make low-risk decisions.*

*When we hyperfocus (think: **4-hour flashlight**) we need to take time to reset afterwards.*

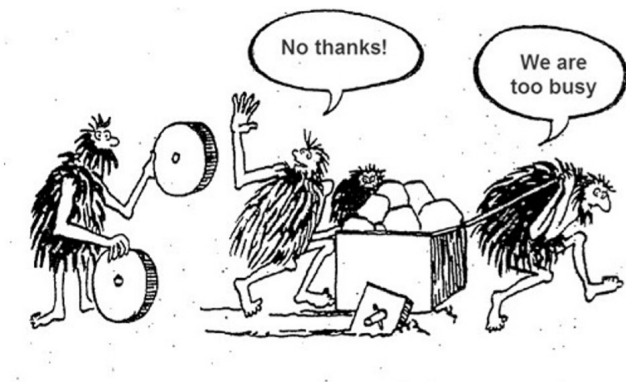
*Our phones are designed to distract us—but we can counter that by using them with **intention**. The same is true for everything in our lives.*

## Traps we fall into

Watch out! These traps are everywhere, like land mines waiting to blow up our priorities. We can **learn to spot them**, and also to **get out of them faster** when we fall in.

**The 'busy' trap:** The busier we are, the more trapped we feel.

### The 'busy' trap...



*"I'm too busy to slow down and think!  
I'll just get my head down, get it done  
and then it will go away..."*



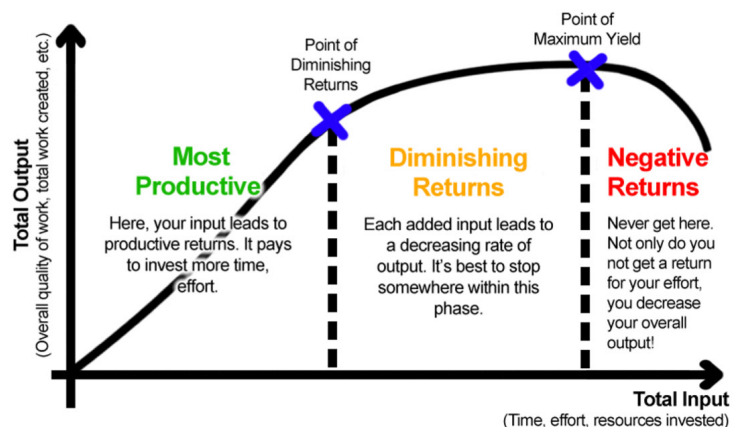
When we feel 'too busy' to take stock that's exactly the red flag you need to stop and check if you're on the right trajectory

**The 'more is more' fallacy:** The equation doesn't add up. **Diminishing returns** every time.

### The fallacy that 'more is more'

The more work we take on the less work we get done **well**.

The law of **diminishing returns**.



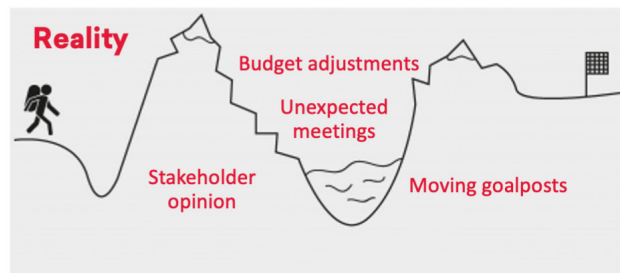
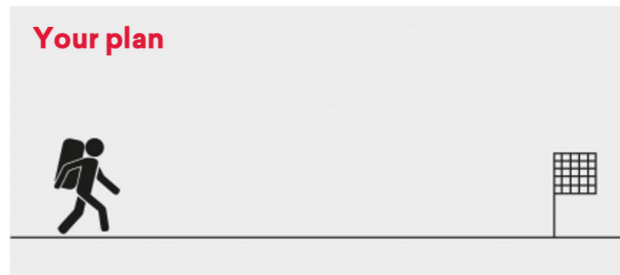
**The optimism trap:** No matter how efficiently we work, we forget that **life can still get in the way.**

### The 'optimism trap'...

Giving more weight to the subjective confidence we have in our ability to achieve against short deadlines.

Then becoming frustrated and disappointed when it doesn't go to plan.

- Get crystal clear upfront on what's truly being asked
- Are you the best person for the job?
- Can the need get met in a different way?
- Prepare for setbacks and adjust timescales



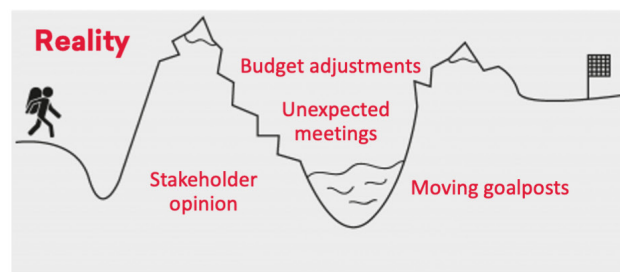
**The capability trap:** Just because you can, **doesn't mean you should.**

### The 'optimism trap'...

Giving more weight to the subjective confidence we have in our ability to achieve against short deadlines.

Then becoming frustrated and disappointed when it doesn't go to plan.

- Get crystal clear upfront on what's truly being asked
- Are you the best person for the job?
- Can the need get met in a different way?
- Prepare for setbacks and adjust timescales



## Expect to manage expectations

Surprise: managing expectations requires intentionality too, and a proactive mindset. But its infinitely preferable to **mismanaging expectations**.

We're not **superheroes**—just people.

## Delegate and relegate

We always want a fast solution. Putting effort upfront in delegation does take time and resources.

You need to **train people** and invest in **coaching** them. What's the solution? **Play the long game**. Delegation will pay off over time!

Remember: when we say yes to more work, we're saying **no to all the other things** in our lives.

## Your workload map

We're continuously **navigating our workload**. And we need a map for that!

### Using your workload map



#### With yourself

- To help prioritise and manage the week's tasks and beyond
- To get a better understanding of how much time you need for certain tasks or activities
- To see how much you can realistically take on in a day or week



#### With your line manager & colleagues

- To align on, prioritise, or explain why you can't take more on
- To help see where your time is being focused
- To create a common language with the people you work with –
  - *"I have a few 'large' tasks I need to focus on this week but I may have time to help with some XS & S things."*
  - *"Next week I'll have time to take on another 'large' "*



# Heads-Up: You'll Need to Plan Ahead!

To prioritise, you need to 1) focus on the **things that matter**, 2) **delegating, postponing or eliminating**, and 3) knowing **what to say 'no' to**.

## Planning ahead

### Focus on the big rocks

Crunch times are intense periods of work. **Be mindful of project timelines** and prioritise the 'right' things.

### Delegate, postpone, or eliminate

**Assess each task** on your list by asking:

- Is the work/task important to you?
- Does it help you deliver against the strategy?
- Will it relieve pressure working on it?
- Does it help you move forward?

If not, delegate, postpone or eliminate the tasks.

### To Don'ts are as important as To Dos

What are you spending time on that might actually be unnecessary or a distraction?

## Focus is key

To deliver against your priorities, focus is absolutely key. Why? Because when you pursue multiple priorities, you **dilute your goals** and **diminish the quality** of your work.

So:

- Don't dilute your focus **without good cause**.
- More is less!
- Delegating or asking for help isn't being weak. It's **working smarter**.

## Summary: Priority Setting & Focus

Setting priorities means when we move from executing requests to **uncovering the why that drives them**.

## Rule of 3: Three's the charm

We follow this rule at Symbia: never go **above 3 things!** Pick 3, do them well, and report on your progress.

### The rule of 3

<div style="background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 10px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <span style="font-size: 24px; margin-right: 10px;">1</span> <span style="font-weight: bold; color: white;">Monday vision</span> </div> <p style="color: #0070C0; margin-top: 10px;"><b>List 3 objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete presentation</li> <li>Start planning Project X</li> <li>Reach out to XXXX</li> </ul> <p style="color: #0070C0; margin-top: 10px;"><b>Focus on outcomes</b> or achievements rather than activities.</p>	<div style="background-color: #FFA500; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 10px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <span style="font-size: 24px; margin-right: 10px;">2</span> <span style="font-weight: bold; color: white;">Daily outcomes</span> </div> <p style="color: #FFA500; margin-top: 10px;"><b>Identify 3 results</b> at the start of each day that you want under your belt.</p>	<div style="background-color: #DC143C; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 10px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <span style="font-size: 24px; margin-right: 10px;">3</span> <span style="font-weight: bold; color: white;">Reflect on progress</span> </div> <p style="color: #DC143C; margin-top: 10px;"><b>Reflect on the week's progress</b> by asking yourself on Fridays:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>What 3 things are going well?</b></li> <li><b>What 3 things can be improved?</b></li> </ul>
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## Enter the matrix

If you were a fan of the Matrix before, apply this priority-setting tool and you'll become a **superfan**. Remember: your **time is your currency**.

### Tool: Covey's Matrix

Remember:  
Your time is  
your currency!

		urgent	not urgent
important	<p style="color: gray; font-size: 12px;">Crises Pending issues Deadlines commitments</p>	<p style="color: gray; font-size: 12px;">Planning Relationships Strategic thinking Self-development Prioritising your time</p>	
not important	<p style="color: gray; font-size: 12px;">Interruptions Some emails Some meetings Other people's to-do list</p>	<p style="color: gray; font-size: 12px;">Social media Many emails Some meetings Mindless distractions</p>	

# Batching: a simple way to organise tasks

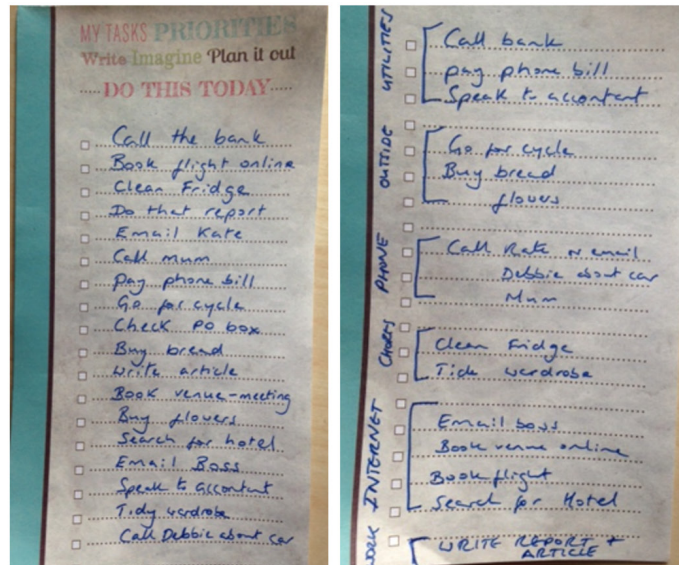
Chunk your to-do's **by category**. It's the **ultimate focus hack** because it saves you from spotlighting your focus.

Pro tip: **combine batching with Covey's Matrix** to go full beast with your prioritisation! **It's batchin'.**

## Tool: Batching for Energy Matching

Use this simple method to organise your tasks by similar categories or type (calls to make, emails to write, home, etc.)

Once you have your list in batches or chunks, it will be easier to tackle them and get them all done in bulk!



## Pushing back is really pushing forward

Is it time to **reframe** your understanding of pushing back?

### Reframe what you think about 'pushing back'



By instinctively saying yes to a work commitment you don't have time or space to take on, **you've often inadvertently said 'no' to several other really important things:**

- **Doing an excellent job** on your other deliverables – because you are now more thinly spread
- **Proper headspace to think:** because you've taken on too much
- **Opportunity to role model focus:** because your team are watching and learning from you
- To **spending the evening with your family** or having a work free weekend
- To the exercise you wanted to do
- To a **properly balanced** life

# Boundaries: Do not cross

Here are some useful ways to communicate your boundaries for better focus.

## Top tips for setting your limits with others

1

**Compliment and thank** the person asking for the opportunity and demonstrate that you **understand this is important to them**, this will let them know you empathise even though you can't necessarily help.

2

**Offer them an alternative approach** to answering their query. If possible, give them choices. Offer them a 'yes but' with a different timeline. Again, this will demonstrate empathy, a practical approach to solution finding and a desire to help.

3

**Tap into useful alternatives** e.g. if they ask X team they might produce the outcome they need with more efficiency or speed or for free/less money.

## Ways to set limits without saying the word 'no'

If the request is coming **from someone more senior...**



If this is not your line manager, explain that you'll need to double **check the new priority list with your manager before agreeing**. Let them know you will get back to them in 48hrs (so they aren't left 'hanging')

If the person **compliments your ability** to do the job well...



**Don't be tricked into saying yes just because of that**. Thank them for the compliment and say you'd love to help them, but the parameters will need to change for you to support them (change in timing/depth/quality of output)

If your fear is that saying no might **damage your relationship...**



You can **express enthusiasm for the opportunity**, but explain that the timing isn't right for everyone to get the best outcome if you take it on.

If it's your boss leaning on you to **take on extra commitments...**



**Create your work map or draft a list of your projects and ask them to help you prioritise and reconfigure your time.**

Doing this also gives visibility to your workload and may lead to a different or better outcome.

# What to do when you feel squeezed

Communication is key to **getting out of a pinch**.

When you are being **unfairly** pressured:

**“I understand** that this is really important to you and we will try everything to get you the answers you need. But please remember, while this has been on your agenda for weeks, we were briefed only yesterday. We would appreciate the time required to get up to speed.”

**“I recognise** that this is a priority for you and we want to give you what you want. But we need to make choices and I would like us to make them together. Which is more important to you, speed or depth of insight? Budget or robustness? (etc. etc.)”

**“As you can imagine,**  
**everyone’s project is a priority.**  
Perhaps if I showed you our current delivery plan you could help me understand what really is a priority and what can be relegated?”

**“It’s worth remembering** that this information is new to us. We need time to process it, cross reference it against our current plans and get back to you with a recommendation on the way forward.”

## Summary: Priority setting and focus

Focus means staying the course on the things that matter to you—prioritisation powered by intention can be your superpower.

### Notes from The EDGE

- When planning your life: Plan as many **to dont's** as **to do's**!
- Are you a **neurosurgeon**? If not, you won't put anyone's life at risk by turning down work! Life will go on.
- To get more done (including your 3 things) consider **starting your day offline**.

### Resources

- Music helps some people focus. Maybe that's why **we started this session with a song**. (Mayra Andrade, We Used to Call it Love)
- Ready to reclaim your stolen focus? **Here's how**. (Johann Hari, NYT)
- 5 ways you can protect yourself mentally and stay focused in **fast-paced work environments** (Jodie Rogers, **The Hidden Edge of Team Performance** podcast)