

HOW TO LEAD
TO IN A
WORLD

OF
DISTRACTION




FOUR SIMPLE HABITS

FOR TURNING DOWN THE NOISE

CLAY SCROGGINS

**HOW
TO LEAD
IN A
WORLD
OF
DISTRACTION**



*MAXIMIZING YOUR INFLUENCE BY
TURNING DOWN THE NOISE*

CLAY SCROGGINS

 **ZONDERVAN
REFLECTIVE**

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How to Lead in a World of Distraction

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THE DANGER OF THE DISTRACTION

I'm so easily distracted.

Last year, my ever-adventurous in-laws from Texas were coming to Atlanta for a visit. Instead of hitting up the same attractions they had done every year with our kids, they asked us if we would want to explore a new city, one within easy driving distance of our home. My wife and her mom got together and planned a short trip to Chattanooga, a pretty cool city with great downtown activities for kids.

It was a hot summer evening in July, and after a busy day at work, I pulled my recently purchased Ford Explorer into the driveway of the rental house we'd booked a few blocks north of Chattanooga. I was the first to arrive, and the owner of the home (who lived right next door) was already there, waiting in the driveway to greet me. Even though the sun hadn't set, the sky was growing dark. A significant thunderstorm was brewing. As soon as I opened my car door to say hello, huge drops of rain began falling. I raced to the front door of the house and followed the owner inside for a quick tour.

Ten minutes later, my wife, our kids, and my in-laws arrived. Our five young kids raced into the house like it was the grand opening of a Chuck E. Cheese and they were giving away free tickets to the first customers. They were excited, to say the least. I kissed my wife, greeted her parents (whom I hadn't seen in a few months), and introduced everyone to Jim, the homeowner. The scene was a little chaotic with everyone suddenly filling the empty house, kids racing around, and multiple conversations taking place. It reminded me of the opening scene of *Home Alone*.

After the greetings and salutations, I made a handoff to my wife so she could download the remaining details about the house from the owner. I hate details. My eyes were already glazing over as Jim dove deeper into the finer points of the ridiculously complicated home theater system. I pointed to the three-ring binder he was showing me. It had all the instructions for anything we would ever want to use. It didn't mean anything to me at the time, but I vaguely remember when the circus arrived and he was in the middle of telling me about a gate at the front of the driveway. It was in working order, but it hadn't been used in a while. But I was hardly listening at this point. There were simply too many distractions.

"You're welcome to use the gate if you want, but I don't see any reason to," he foreshadowed. I nodded my head in affirmation, but my mind was distracted by his odd resemblance to an odd combination of Bill Wennington, the former Chicago Bulls player, and Walter White from *Breaking Bad*.

As I said, I'm easily distracted.

Even though it was only 7:00 p.m., our youngest child, Whit, who was six months old at the time, was letting us know

he was ready for bed. So before I unpacked the rest of my wife's van, I wrestled with the pack-n-play, cramming it into the closet like an all-pro dad. I de-escalated a confrontation between two of our older kids and confiscated the dart set they had found in the basement. That seemed safe. After finishing the rest of the unloading process, I assisted my wife with bath time for the little ones, helped our older kids locate a place to sleep, convinced the one still bleeding from the badly thrown dart that a band-aid was not needed because it was merely a flesh wound, and then collapsed into bed around 10:00 p.m. After all, I had to get up at 5:00 a.m. to make the two-hour drive back to work because I had a meeting the next morning I just couldn't miss.

Or so I thought.

As I do every morning, I woke up without my alarm and jumped right in the shower. I remember having a random thought as I was looking through my overnight bag for a toothbrush.

Where did I put my car keys?

I retraced the previous night in my head—the storm, the homeowner conversations, the in-law greetings, and the juggling act to get the kids settled. I couldn't remember doing anything with them. I must have left them in the car.

Hmmm. That probably wasn't smart.

Stepping outside into that dark, muggy Chattanooga morning was a moment I'll never forget.

Weird. Where's my car?

Didn't I park in the driveway? I was sure I did.

Would my wife or my in-laws have moved it? I could think of no reason for them to have done that. Could my kids have

moved it? If they had, I wouldn't even be mad. That would be impressive.

And then it hit me. I *had* left my keys in the car. I had been so distracted by the flurry of arriving and unloading that I left them in the ignition. And now my car had been stolen.

Distractions are a problem.

EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE

None of us are immune to the growing cacophony of distractions all around us. Over the last few years, I've asked many people a simple question: Are there more or fewer distractions in our world today than there were ten years ago? The answer is always a resounding, "More!" We all feel it. And we are drowning in them everywhere we go.

It's a problem in the workplace as employers face a distraction epidemic. In 2016 CareerBuilder conducted a survey on the topic of distractions, asking two thousand hiring and HR managers to identify the top culprits of workplace distractions. The most common answers aren't surprising: smartphones (55 percent), the internet (41 percent), gossip (37 percent), social media (37 percent), coworkers dropping by (27 percent), smoking or snack breaks (27 percent), email (26 percent), meetings (24 percent), and noisy coworkers (20 percent).¹ Even worse is the direct effect these distractions have on productivity: "Three in four employers (75 percent) say two or more hours a day are lost in productivity because employees are distracted. Forty-three percent say at least three hours a day are lost." Look again at that list. Several of the items mentioned as common distractions are *recent* problems, the result of shifting technology, and

most employers are still trying to determine their cost. But one thing is clear. There is a cost. And the distractions we face in the workplace are only getting worse.

Work isn't the only place we face distractions, though. It's an epidemic in our homes as well. I have too many stories of missing something in my kids' lives because my mind was consumed with something else. I'm distracted and not always present, even when I'm in the same room as my family. I might be mulling over a problem at work, or I could be distracted by my Twitter feed. Put this in the category of "Parenting Fails." Just last week, my wife and I were managing bath time for our little kids when we lost one of them. It was only for five minutes, so please hold your judgment until you hear the full story.

Our youngest son, Whit, is still learning to walk, and he was finished with his bath and ready for bed. By ready for bed, I mean he was waiting on me to put on his diaper and pajamas. Evidently, he had waited long enough. I was distracted, fixing something on the camera in his room, and somehow I didn't notice him quietly crawling away. In the middle of helping another kid with some surprisingly difficult homework, my wife yelled at me from the other room, "Will you put Whit to bed?" To her credit, my wife is a stickler for bedtime, and since it was a few minutes past 7:00 p.m., she was keenly aware he was already late.

I looked around to find him and then realized he was gone. No problem. I was sure he had found a tube of toothpaste and was creatively decorating the bathroom walls with it (insert eye roll emoji). Since the gate on the stairs was wide open, I headed downstairs. I looked in every room, but I couldn't find him anywhere.

That's when I noticed that the door leading outside was wide open. That was odd. Surely he hadn't gone outside.

Boy, was I wrong. Not only had he crawled out of the house, he was now making his way down our street. He had passed about four houses by the time I found him. To his credit, he was taking the sidewalk. And to the amusement of our neighbors, he was completely naked. It was quite a show for a lovely spring evening.

We later laughed at the consequences of that distraction, but not all our distracted moments are so comical. In fact, there is much for us to be concerned about as we consider the ongoing effects of technology on our families. Despite the increase of face time between children and parents, the quality of our engagement with one another is decreasing. As *The Atlantic* notes, the effects are problematic for both children and parents, and the future consequences are largely unknown:

For all the talk about children's screen time, surprisingly little attention is paid to screen use by parents themselves, who now suffer from what the technology expert Linda Stone more than 20 years ago called "continuous partial attention." This condition is harming not just us, as Stone has argued; it is harming our children. The new parental-interaction style can interrupt an ancient emotional cueing system, whose hallmark is responsive communication, the basis of most human learning. We're in uncharted territory.²

But the problem isn't limited to relationships between kids and parents. It affects marriages as well. I recently saw a meme that said, "Marriage is just texting each other memes

from different rooms.” Sadly, while that’s funny, it’s also true for some people. More and more marriages are experiencing the negative consequences of our distracted lives. By one estimate, one-third of divorces in recent years were the result of people addicted to or wrongly interacting with Facebook.³ Other studies are more conservative in their findings but still note a significant link between higher social media use and decreased marriage quality.⁴ While more research needs to be done, the initial findings are not encouraging. Nor are they surprising.

DISTRACTION KNOWS NO AGE

I would imagine that your life is filled with distractions as well. That’s probably why you picked up this book. And even that is ironic because one of the growing distractions in our world is the number of unread books on our bookshelves. Of the books I buy or am gifted by others, I may start one out of three and finish only one out of ten. If you’re anything like me, the chances that you’ll finish this book without getting distracted are about as good as the chances that I’ll finish this chapter without checking my email.

Gimme a minute. I’ll be right back.

I don’t need to spend a lot of time telling you how distracted our world is. You already know that. There are more distractions today than there have ever been in the history of the world. Consider that we have a law that prohibits you from operating a motor vehicle while staring at your phone. That we even need this law is ludicrous, and it’s a symptom of a deeper problem. For crying out loud, when you’re operating a

machine of moving metal, you should probably focus on what's ahead. I'm talking to myself at this point.

Before we blame the Millennials for another problem, I want to be clear this is *not* a generational thing, or a gender thing, or a temperament thing. Distraction—whether due to technology or simply the changing pace of life in our world—has affected all of us. It touches every part of our lives.

I see distracted Baby Boomers. A good friend of mine called just before Christmas and said, “My sixty-five-year-old parents are more distracted by their iPads than my five-year-old son. I honestly think I'm going to put restrictions on their devices while they're at my house for the next week.” Let me know how that turned out, my friend.

I see it in the Gen Xers. I just read a study that said the age group most addicted to their phones is those middle-aged, “graying Gen Xers.”⁵ Not only is this generation of adults using their devices forty minutes more each day than their younger peers, they are the most likely to pull out their phones at the dinner table. Much of their device use is work related and commonly justified as necessary. “The midpoint of life is when your need to communicate peaks,” Clive Thompson writes.⁶ And that *need* to stay in touch with friends, keep up with the emails at work, and manage life can easily lead to habits of distraction.

Obviously, distraction is affecting the Millennial generation. I'm in that odd spot of having been born at the borderline of the Millennial years, so I'm sensitive to the glut of critique and criticism this generation has received. My Millennial coworkers are excited for Gen Z to take some of the spotlight now. They're ready to be left alone. Still, we can't turn a blind eye to the way the abundance of information in recent

times has created countless more distractions than in previous generations. There was a day when you didn't know the answer to something and you simply didn't know. Millennials have grown up with the mantra: "Well, we don't have to *not* know!" And this awareness that somewhere out there the answer or that one bit of information can be found has created an unprecedented level of distraction. Consider all the options we have now . . . Google it or Shazam it or Wikipedia it or ask Alexa. But we no longer have to *not* know.

Side note: Whoever drew the line between Gen Xers and Millennials got it wrong. The real point of delineation between these two generations is the popularization of the internet. Growing up with an accessible internet means a radically different childhood from someone who didn't have that experience. I was born in 1980, and while I'm "technically" a borderline Millennial, it's absurd to compare my experience with that of someone born after the early '90s. If you remember the experience of pulling over to a gas station and frantically looking for a quarter to use a pay phone, you're not a Millennial.

And let's not forget the distractions in the Gen Z generation. A few months ago, I walked around a college campus for a few hours, and as I passed classroom after classroom, I was struck by how different they look today from when I was in college. Every student was staring at a laptop or a tablet or a phone. And if you were foolish enough to think they were taking notes, you'd be wrong, because they weren't. I don't think a single student was paying attention to the professor. And I don't blame them. I can't even imagine how much ADHD medication I would have needed as a college student if I'd had internet access sitting in a college physics class. Not a chance of paying attention.

I'm not writing this book to blame everything on the almighty smartphone, although it does belong square in the crosshairs as enemy number one. According to the most recent Global Mobile Consumer Survey taken by Deloitte, most people take their phones to the dinner table, watch TV with a device in front of them, sleep next to their phones, check their email first thing in the morning, and even wake up in the middle of the night to check it.⁷ What's interesting is comparing the number of people who say their smartphone is a problem with the number of people who say they're actively doing something about it. Both are growing at staggering rates.

No, the actual phone or device is not the root of our problem. It's only the conduit to other things—programs and games and images that stimulate our minds and bodies and shape our thoughts and desires. All this simply exacerbates feelings of discontent and increases our longing to feed our unsatisfied desires and provide for unmet needs. As comedian Gary Gulman jokes, “The phone is just a seldom-used app on my phone.”⁸ It's every other app on the phone that is fighting for our attention and the attention of our children. I'm alarmed when I hear that many app developers don't allow their own kids to use the software they create. Steve Jobs himself was a low-tech parent.⁹ I wonder what these people know that most of us are missing. Perhaps those closest to the problem in Silicon Valley see the danger for what it really is. In an article in the *New York Times*, Nellie Bowles writes, “The people who are closest to a thing are often the most wary of it. Technologists know how phones really work, and many have decided they don't want their own children anywhere near them.”¹⁰

People are starting to wake up to the numbing effects of

our distracting technologies and the attention-grabbing noises and sights of our consumer culture. I'm distracted, you're distracted—we're all distracted—but those distractions are not the real problem. It's actually worse than that.

THE REAL PROBLEM WITH DISTRACTIONS

This world of distraction collects a toll from us. All the benefits of technology and our media-saturated, 24/7 consumer culture come at a cost. And it may be more expensive than you realize. I'm not talking about the sum of your music, media, and food subscriptions (though you may want to add the total of your Stitch Fix, Dollar Shave Club, Amazon Prime, Hulu, HBO Go, Evernote Premium, and Blue Apron monthly fees sometime). Dave Ramsey would certainly be pleased if you did the math on that, but I'm referring to something deeper than mere dollars and cents. All these distractions are costing you something that you can't see, at least not immediately. And you need to understand this cost, because living unaware would be a tragic mistake.

The distractions in my life have cost me something far greater than the nuisance of a stolen car. The Chattanooga PD eventually found my car, but one unexpected benefit of having it stolen that night was how it forced me to slow down from my normal crazy pace. I was able to step back and realize that my distracted lifestyle was not healthy or sustainable. Like most do-it-yourself home improvement projects, distractions will make the things you want to do in life take longer and cost more than you might realize. In the weeks that followed, I was able to identify several problems caused by distractions, and

after categorizing and combining them, I've narrowed them down to three price tags you'll need to pay, if not now, then at some point in the future:

1. The opportunity cost of the unknown.
2. The lack of traction caused by the distraction.
3. The failure to live your best life.

Let's consider each of them as we get started.

The Opportunity Cost of the Unknown

First, let's think about what I call the *opportunity cost* of your distractions. I'm assuming you're familiar with this term. It alludes to the unknown nature of the things your distractions are distracting you from. When economists and sociologists talk about *opportunity costs*, they are speaking of the benefits you miss out on by choosing one thing over another. With all the benefits of technology, we tend to downplay or overlook some of those costs. But the truth is that with every notification alert, or every mouse click, or that "I'm gonna read just one more" Reddit strand, or whatever your current Netflix rabbit hole is, you are being distracted *from* something. That time, that energy, that moment where you are present—it's sacrificed and lost. An *opportunity* is lost with every distraction we feed.

What is that opportunity? Honestly, I don't know. And for your life right now, it doesn't matter whether *I* know. What matters is whether *you* know. I'll give you some examples if you're having a difficult time coming up with any. It might be the opportunity to develop stronger, more meaningful relationships. It might be the ability to be more present with those

around you. It might be the opportunity to develop a skill you wouldn't otherwise develop. It might be a chance to become more emotionally aware. But whatever it is on the other side of that distraction, I know it's something worth discovering. But you won't gain the benefits of those opportunities because of the distractions in your life. Every opportunity lost has a cost.

The Lack of Traction Caused by the Distraction

If we do an etymology study on the word *distract*, it gives us a simple picture that can teach us something true about the opportunity cost of our distractions. The word *distract* means “to draw apart,” and that definition is rooted in the two syllables that make up the word. The Latin verb *trahere* (-tract) means “to draw,” and the prefix *dis* means “away from.” Our distractions are literally drawing us away from something.

“Caw. Caw. Hey. Who. Who. Hey! You two. *You!* Lookuphere! Lookuphere!”¹¹ (Thank you, Lucky Day, as played by Steve Martin in *Three Amigos*.)

Okay, back to the word *distract*. Yes, to distract someone is to pull them away from something. Your distractions are pulling you away from other things, important things, things and people you love and goals you want to achieve. Your distractions are keeping you from gaining momentum in your life. They are keeping you from gaining *traction* in your life. Look closely at the word again.

Dis-traction.

A lack of traction in life will eventually lead to disaster. On Tuesday, January 28, 2014, Winter Storm Leon attacked Atlanta, Georgia, with two (yes, two) inches of snow, causing chaos that left Atlanta resembling a real-life scene from *The*

Walking Dead. A loss of traction caused the devastation and mayhem. When traction is lost, things that are in motion will spin out of control. They *have* nothing to grab hold of, nothing to allow for forward momentum. For your own quick distraction, do yourself a favor and Google “2014 Atlanta snowstorm” to see what I mean.

This was a day I’ll never forget as Leon created a massive gridlock on the highways and interstates throughout the city; 1,254 car accidents were reported and thousands of cars were left stranded on the sides of roads. Atlanta mayor Kasim Reed defended his handling of the situation, arguing, “We got one million people out of the city of Atlanta in about 12 hours.”¹² And he was right. There were countless reports of people experiencing 10-hour+ commutes home, many of them eventually abandoning their cars and walking the remainder of the way.

Over the next several weeks, the snowstorm was the number one topic of conversation with everyone I bumped into. And the most common question was, “How long did it take you to get home during Snowmageddon?” Everyone had their own story of walking several miles to get home, staying overnight at a friend’s house, or even spending the night in the aisle of a CVS drugstore. All this chaos was caused by a single problem: the loss of traction on the roadways.

Without traction, we can’t move forward. And what people experienced literally in their vehicles during the Atlanta Snowmageddon is something that happens every day in our lives. So many of us know the feeling of just spinning our wheels. A lot of energy is expended. We can hear the noise and smell something happening, but we aren’t gaining any momentum. We aren’t moving forward. So many people are

looking to find their footing in life but just can't seem to find any traction.

Is that you? If so, you're not alone. I know the consequences of an overabundance of distractions and the way they make us feel stuck. As a pastor, I'm well aware of that frustrating feeling of spinning my wheels, only to get nowhere. Countless people are busy and fill their days with loads of activities, only to collapse in bed at night exhausted. And they wonder, *Did I accomplish anything meaningful today?* Distraction-filled days lead to traction-less lives.

The Failure to Live Your Best Life

Honestly, I'm over the phrase "I'm living my best life." Has it reached "kids doing the floss dance" annoying? Not quite, but it's close. (Don't act like you've never tried the floss dance in front of a mirror in the privacy of your own home.) Seriously though, I'm over it. One more Instagram pic of your friend's post-yoga workout, her parents' killer lake house dock, or her latest order of avocado toast with the hashtag #LivingMyBestLife and we'll both hit *Send* on some regrettable snarky comment. Whether you're over that phrase or not, hopefully we can both agree that "living your best life," if it means anything, means a life of fewer distractions, not more.

And that leads me to a simple observation: your distractions are holding you back from becoming a better you! They are getting in the way of your ability to grow as a person and as a leader. They are holding you back from exerting effort on your own improvement. The distractions in your life are pulling you away from the things that truly matter, keeping you from living a life of momentum, forward progress, and growth. And that

means they will certainly, if they haven't already, hamper your ability to live your best life. That's what distractions are meant to do.

CLEAR EYES AND FULL HEARTS

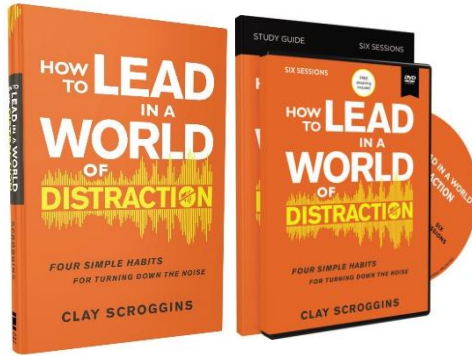
It's no wonder our society is perhaps the most stressed, depressed, and anxious group of humans ever to walk the planet. Distractions are like eating Tide pods. Objectively, it makes no sense and you will sound crazy trying to explain it to your grandmother. After you've given in to a distraction and satisfied that urge, you won't even be glad you did it, but it is guaranteed to get you to stop thinking about whatever it was you *were* thinking about—most likely something important and meaningful. You might have a story to share. And you will certainly have something to upload to YouTube. But it's a fleeting pleasure, here for a moment and then gone. A life of distractions is a shallow life, a life lived without self-awareness. It's a life lived in constant anticipation of the next thing that will keep you from slowing down to listen to what's happening within.

Well, I'm not okay with any of it—the Tide pods or the distractions. The good news is that you can do something about this. And I'm here to help. I wrote this book as a guide, a manual on how to turn down the distractions in your life. But my primary focus isn't on better time management or a plan to end your addiction to social media. I'll have some ideas there, but other books offer tips and techniques to deal with those things. My hope in this book is to help you taste and see what's on the other side. I want you to see with clarity and longing for

the better life available to you if you begin to turn down your distractions. I want you to see that it's worth the effort. But here is the key: you are the only one who can actually do something about this. You are in charge of your own life. You are the one who needs to lead, and it starts by leading yourself. You're the only one who can honestly judge your distractions, look at what they're costing you, and then do something about them.

Obviously, you won't be able to eliminate all distractions from your life. As we'll discuss in the next chapter, that wouldn't even be healthy. You can, however, *limit* the distractions so you can begin to gain traction on the path that reflects your true desires, the things that matter most. As a pastor and spiritual advisor to many people, I've seen this happen in countless lives, and I've experienced it on a personal level in my own life as well. I promise you—you can do it and it is worth it!

This book is about getting back on track in a world that will distract you right into the ditch.



HOW TO LEAD IN A WORLD OF DISTRACTION

by CLAY SCROGGINS

Maximize your influence while turning down the noise.

While many leaders have learned to tune out distractions that keep them from being productive, they remain deaf to their inner desires and emotions. In *How to Lead in a World of Distraction*, Clay Scroggins teaches leaders four simple habits--finding simplicity, speaking to yourself, getting quiet, and pressing pause--that create space for emotional evaluation and exploration.

Transforming the toxic cocktail of emotional distraction starts with emotional awareness--being able to identify and understand your emotions--which ultimately leads to emotional healing and transformed leadership. And it all starts here.

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