

Filter Out the Noise

It can seem like our lives are filled with busyness, noise, distractions, and often meaningless activities.

What if we could filter out all that noise, and focus on the meaningful?

What if we could find stillness instead of constant distraction?

I believe that most of us have that power. In my experience, most of the noise is there by choice, but we've fallen into patterns over the years and it can seem like we're not able to change them.

Let's talk about ways to filter out the noise, then how to find stillness and meaning.

Ways to Filter the Noise

Take the rest of today to notice what noise you find in your life. Even take a little time to make a list, whenever you find distraction or busyness.

For example, noise in my life comes from: email, Whatsapp, Snapchat, Twitter, blogs and other sites I like to read, text messages, Slack, and watching Netflix. You might have other sources: Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, news, cable TV.

Once we're aware of the noise, how can we filter it out? *We have to decide that we want more quiet and meaning in our lives.* That it's important enough to "miss out" on some things in those noisy channels.

Then we can take action:

- Turn off notifications as much as possible. Including the unread messages count by each app on your phone.
- Decide to check on some things (like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) just once a day. Others you can check twice a day, or three times if needed (like email or Slack). But set a limit.
- Delete accounts or delete apps that aren't giving you real meaning (I deleted my Facebook account years ago).
- Unsubscribe from everything possible in your email account. And from Twitter or any other app where you're "following" people or blogs/websites. If you use an RSS reader, unsubscribe from as many feeds as possible. Leave only a handful that give you meaning.
- Tell people that you are only checking your messages once a day, to set expectations.

Don't use an autoresponder — I find those annoying. Instead, just send a message to the people who matter most, and ask that they be understanding.

- Set a time each day when you watch TV or movies (if at all). Set a time of day when you read news or blogs (if at all). If you say, "I only watch TV after 7 p.m.," then you've limited how much space this takes up in your life.
- If there are some things (like email, for example) where you need to stay connected because of work, try to negotiate with your boss or team so that you can find periods of disconnection. For example, ask if you can take a couple hours in the morning and a couple in the afternoon to be disconnected, to focus on more important work.

If you take these actions, you'll filter out most of the noise.

What's left? Time for quiet, stillness, focus and meaning.

Finding Stillness & Meaning

Once you've filtered out the noise, you are left with a few interesting problems:

1. Changing your habits of busyness and constant movement.
2. Figuring out what's meaningful.
3. Learning to stop and stay still.

I think those are wonderful problems to be faced with. Most people never even consider them. Find gratitude that you can work on this at all.

Take some time to notice your constant need for busyness or distraction. For example, if you have a moment where you're not doing anything — you're waiting in line, you're alone at your restaurant table while your friend goes to the bathroom, you're sitting on your couch — what do you try to do out of habit? **This is your pattern of busyness and movement.**

Now see if you can let go of those patterns. Catch yourself, and instead opt for stillness and quiet. Try to just sit there and notice your surroundings. Soak it all in. Savor the moment. Meditate on your breath. Reflect on your day. Ask yourself what you're grateful for right now.

Start building new patterns of stillness. For example, try morning meditation on your breath, even if just for a few minutes every day. Try going for a morning or evening walk, without your phone. Try turning the phone and computer off and just journal.

Start finding activities that are more meaningful to you. This doesn't have to be done in one day — you can slowly experiment to figure out what's meaningful to you. You might start writing a book or screenplay, for example, or taking photos or drawing or

making music. You might decide to start a business or charity that changes the world. You might start to learn something that's meaningful, or teach others. Find ways to help others and make the world a better place. Journal, meditate, exercise, make healthy food, declutter, make dates with people who are important to you.

When you notice yourself running to busyness and distraction, pause. Turn instead towards stillness and your meaningful activities.

Build a life around stillness and meaning, and notice the difference it makes in you.