

PAYATTENTIONPAYATTEN
TIONPAYATTENTIONPAYAT
ENTIONPAYATTENTIONPAY
ATTENT

“The difference between success and failure is often the same as the difference between happiness and frustration: deciding to use intention. Neen makes it clear that our attention is too important to be frittered away merely because someone (or something) decided to grab it.” —**SETH GODIN**, bestselling author of *Linchpin*

ATTENTION PAYS

ATTENT

HOW TO DRIVE PROFITABILITY,
PRODUCTIVITY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

PAYATTENTIONPAYATTEN
TIONPAYATTENTIONPAYA
TTENTIONPAYATTENTION
PAYATTENTIONPAYATTE
TIONPAYATTENTIONPAYA
T

NEEN JAMES

ATTENTIONPAYATTENTIO
PAYATTENTIONPAYATTEN

WILEY

"In a world that continues to demand more, Neen's honest insights, powerful research and bubbly humor drives home the importance of managing internal and external factors to reclaim our time and attention. I recommend this book to everyone, at every level, looking for winning attention strategies to lead a more fulfilled, productive and intentional life."

—Mary Rooney,
Vice President, Strategic Planning
and Communications, Comcast Spotlight

"In the business world where leaders are often distracted and overwhelmed, this book provides solutions every person can implement in their personal and professional life.

Leading a life of significance requires you to pay attention to who, and what really matters. Neen's attention frameworks and strategies make this a must-read for anyone wanting to be a more current, relevant and influential leader.

I am recommending the staff and students at High Point University follow Ms. James advice to be more thoughtful each day, more productive each week, and more responsible each year."

—Dr. Nido R. Qubein,
President, High Point University

"There's no one who knows—or pays—attention like Neen James. That means there's no one better to help you understand not only why attention is so important in our 'Attention Deficit Society,' but also to guide you through shifting into the kind of intentional attention that really pays. Full of insight, research, and straight talk—just like Neen herself!—this book should be required reading for anyone who wants to truly gain control of their work and life."

—Tamsen Webster, Co-Producer TEDx Cambridge,
Founder of Red Thread

"Attention Pays is a masterclass in how to influence others, win business and lead teams. In a world where everybody is crazy busy, this book gives you the tools to cut through the clutter so you're seen, heard, and understood. I've made it required reading for my staff and clients."

—Michael Port, NY Times, WSJ Bestselling
author of *Steal the Show*

"Attention Pays captures the most important thing everyone wants in this world, other's attention. Everyone wants to feel important and Neen James shares how to do just that in this wonderful book that every leader & team member should read. Welcome to the Attention Revolution!"

—John R. DiJulius III, Author of
The Customer Service Revolution

"What I appreciate so much about Neen's very attentive (to the reader!) book is this: being attentive isn't just a binary goal (e.g., you are either paying attention or you aren't). It's a practice. Focusing on Intentional Attention lets us forgive ourselves for those lapses we all have—but gives us a tool box to put successful attention "in our way"—which in turn puts success in our way. Turn off your phone, and read this book."

—Tom Webster,
Vice President, Strategy, Edison Research

"After an extremely successful and provocative read with *Folding Time*, Neen James hits another home run with *Attention Pays*. There were so many powerful messages around being highly productive, but through an ever-changing personal and professional landscape — we have lost the ability to give our undivided attention. This consistently happens in the workplace and unfortunately, outside of the workplace as well. We have to be intentionally investing all the time, there's no other choice. The rewards are immeasurable."

—Bob O'Brien,
Vice President, Southwest Region,
Comcast Spotlight

"There are teachers and gurus, innovators and thought leaders. And then there is Neen James. Years ago when we met, I was immediately struck by her power to ignite a room, to change how people think about themselves, and to demonstrate what is possible if we pay attention and create a life of intention. Neen's power is in her authenticity. She absolutely talks the talk (like no other), but Neen truly walks the walk—and, in those signature pink heels, no less.

Neen values relationship and service to others above all else. She is a passionate connector of people, and one of the most generous professionals I've ever met. Neen changed my life for the better, and when you immerse yourself in Attention Pays, she will no doubt change yours."

—Elizabeth Lucas-Averett (Ella),
Host of On Air with Ella

"Neen James has written a brilliant book that demands us all to sit up and pay attention. From the insightful research on the costs of inattention to the practical tips and strategies that allow us to harness the power of intentional attention in all walks of our lives, this book is a must read for anyone who wants to be more focused, more productive and have more impact on the world."

—Toni Newman,
Founder of The Innovation Advantage,
Professional Catalyst

"Stop everything you are doing and join the Attention Revolution, led by the inimitable Neen James. In this chaotic and cacophonous world, Neen teaches you to control what demands your attention, and to prioritize what really matters, with equal parts love, humor, and brilliance. This book is essential reading for every leader who cares about their relationships at home, at work, and in their community."

—Laura Gassner Otting, Chief Confidence Catalyst

"In *Attention Pays* Neen brings the business world closer to building real relationships. We are in a time-stressed world, responding to demands of others and jump at every phone's notification, taking us away from people in front of us. This has a negative impact on relationships and success. In a frenzied environment, and we miss chances to connect. Neen's attention strategies help us focus on everyday important interactions, help control distractions, improve connections and live each precious moments. This focus helps me be a better employee, father, and husband. This book helps your organization analyze factors diminishing your attention and put the care back in your relationships with customers, clients, and employees. You will find that attention pays."

—Scott D. Ferrin, Field Director, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)

"*Attention Pays* reads like a business book for the inefficient and exhausted. But it's actually a field guide to living your life with more balance, intention, focus, joy. Sneaky move, Neen!"

—Ann Handley, WSJ Bestselling Author of *Everybody Writes* & Chief Content Officer, MarketingProfs

"From the moment Neen shared this idea with me, I knew she had a winner. Her unique perspective on this important topic is critical for all leaders today. Attention Pays will help businesses stay relevant, leaders improve morale, and individuals grow business relationships on the bottom line. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to differentiate themselves...from leaders who want to stand out, to parents who want to create more significant memories with their kids, the message is clear. Attention Pays."

—Clint Greenleaf, CEO, HomePlate Peanut Butter

"Do yourself a big life-changing favor and take the wise lessons of Attention Pays to heart and you will morph in really important ways. Neen James helps you tame the "squirrels" of the un-focused brain to lead you to a personal and professional life of effectiveness, well-being and enormous impact."

—Scott Halford, Wall Street Journal Bestselling
Author of *Activate Your Brain*,
Member National Speakers Hall of Fame

"I have no doubt that we create in our lives the things we pay attention to, good and bad. Managing time is good, managing energy is smart but paying attention is where the real growth lay. In a world of constant distraction, paying attention is our competitive advantage."

—Matt Church, Founder of Thought Leaders Global

"A devastating indictment of flawed time management and bogus multitasking, *Attention Pays* will rewire how you do EVERYTHING. Your to-do list should have exactly one item: buy this book."

—Jay Baer,
Founder of *Convince & Convert* and
Author of *Hug Your Haters*

"If you wish you could focus on what matters, stop doing things that rob you of profit and success, and improve interaction with business colleagues, clients and loved ones, then slap your distracted self and pick up *Attention Pays* by Neen James. It'll change your life."

—Ian Altman,
Bestselling Co-Author of *Same Side Selling*

"You and I have been admonished by parents and others to 'Pay attention!' Less likely have you been told that attention pays as Neen James does in this insightful and practical new book. If you want to be a more effective leader or just live a fuller, richer life, then I recommend you read this book."

—Mark Sanborn,
Speaker and Author of *The Fred Factor*
and *The Potential Principle*

"It turns out we can't manage our time, we can only manage our attention. In this insightful book, Neen James shows us how being more intentional with our attention helps us get the results we want at work, at home and in our communities.

Put down your phone and read this book. It will forever change how you pay attention.

Learning how to pay intentional attention personally, professionally and globally can change every aspect of your life. In *Attention Pays*, Neen James gives you the playbook."

—Clay Hebert,
Founder of Clarity and Growth

"I had no idea the cost of inattention. Neen James gave me an insight into this topic that I really needed to hear! Neen is so spot-on with her insight into what is ailing us. Not only costing us in our pockets but in our health. This is an important read. Don't read this book unless you are serious about getting your act together! I put it down in the middle and actually did what Neen suggests and it helped my focus immediately."


—Laurie Guest CSP, Guest Enterprises, Inc.

ATTENTION PAYS

**HOW TO DRIVE PROFITABILITY,
PRODUCTIVITY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

NEEN JAMES

WILEY



To you, my brilliant friend.

Your beautiful mind showed me
the power of attention.

To you, my brilliant reader.
Your undivided attention is the greatest gift
you can give someone.

Today, invest one minute, in one interaction,
to create one significant moment,
for just one person that may create
one memory that will last a lifetime.

♡—Neen James

Contents

List of Illustrations xxi

Acknowledgments xxiii
A Love Note from Neen xxiii

About the Author xxvii

Introduction xxix
Does Your Attention Pay? xxix
The Costs of Inattention xxxi
Intention Is What Makes Attention Valuable xxxii
An Attention Revolution xxxiv
Attention Pays xxxv
Attention Is Yoga for Your Mind xxxvii

PART ONE
DOES YOUR ATTENTION PAY? 1

Chapter 1
Our Attention-Deficit Society 3
Internal Factors 5
The Great Multitasking Myth 5

CONTENTS

<i>The “Over Trilogy”—Overwhelmed, Overstressed, and Overtired</i>	6
<i>Generational Differences</i>	9
External Factors	11
<i>Physical Environment</i>	11
<i>How the Media and Information Overload Changed Our Attention</i>	12
<i>Our Technology Addiction</i>	14
<i>Our Addiction to Social Media and Apps</i>	18
<i>Destruction of the Work-Life Boundary</i>	21
The Costs of the Attention-Deficit Society	24

Chapter 2

Listen with Your Eyes: The Power of Intentional Attention 29

Intentional Attention	31
<i>Conscious Versus Unconscious</i>	31
<i>Deliberate Versus Distracted</i>	32
<i>Transformational Versus Transactional</i>	33
<i>The Intentional Attention Model</i>	35
Change Is Hard—But Oh So Worth It!	38
<i>Change Your Brain</i>	39
<i>Change Your Focus</i>	41
<i>Change Your Habits</i>	43
How to Make Your Attention Pay	47

PART TWO

PERSONALLY—BE THOUGHTFUL 51

Chapter 3

Personalize Performance: Brand Building, Nido Qubein Style 53

Practice Self-Care	55
<i>Establish a Morning Routine</i>	56
<i>Establish a Night Routine</i>	57
<i>Schedule Recovery Time</i>	59
<i>Set Boundaries with Your Devices and Social Media</i>	60

CONTENTS

Manage Your Personal Brand	62
<i>What Does Your Personal Brand Say About You?</i>	62
<i>Become Your Own Publicist</i>	65
<i>Always Plan for the Next Opportunity</i>	65
<i>Find and Connect with Advocates</i>	67
<i>Be the Duck</i>	68
<i>Seek Feedback</i>	68
Manage Your Communications	69
<i>Grow Your Confidence</i>	69
<i>Be Conscious of Your Language</i>	70

Chapter 4

Focus on VIPs: Systemize Thoughtfulness	73
Focus on Your VIPs	74
<i>Who Needs Your Attention in Your Personal Life?</i>	74
<i>Who Needs Your Attention at Work?</i>	77
<i>The Other Kind of VIPs</i>	79
Manage Your Communications with Others	80
<i>Use People's Names</i>	80
<i>Be a Fascinated Listener</i>	80
<i>Know Their Preferred Communication Style and Mode</i>	82
Manage Your Relationships with Others	83
<i>Step Away from the Device!</i>	83
<i>Create Significant Moments</i>	84
<i>Rev Your RAZ for Recognition</i>	87
Implement Systemized Thoughtfulness	88

PART THREE

PROFESSIONALLY—BE PRODUCTIVE 93

Chapter 5

Prioritize Your Priorities: Create Significant Moments	95
Pack Your Highest Priorities	97
Protect Your Time	99
<i>Systemize Your Calendar</i>	100

CONTENTS

<i>Defend Against Your Biggest Distraction</i>	103
<i>Outsource Your Life</i>	106
Guard Your Focus	107
<i>“No” Is a Complete Sentence</i>	108
<i>Bring Back the Gatekeeper</i>	110
<i>Fight Decision Fatigue</i>	111
<i>Discipline Your Use of Devices and Social Media</i>	112
Chapter 6	
Create a Culture of Attention: Stop the Madness	117
Show Them the Path and then Empower Them to Take It	118
Cultivate an Environment Where Productivity Thrives	121
<i>Create an Agile Work Culture</i>	121
<i>Reduce Stress and Promote Healthy Choices</i>	125
Stop the Meeting Madness	129
Communicate Clearly with Contextual Models	132
PART FOUR	
GLOBALLY—BE RESPONSIBLE	137
Chapter 7	
Make an Impact: The Great (Disappearing) Barrier Reef	139
You Can Make an Impact	141
Leverage Your Leadership	143
Organizational Stewardship	144
<i>Create a Connection</i>	144
<i>Being Responsible Can also Be Profitable</i>	145
<i>The Power of Employee Service Days</i>	146

CONTENTS

Chapter 8

Join the Attention Revolution 149

Bonus Chapter: Build an Organization That Pays Attention 154

Empower Your Team to Give Intentional Attention 156

Leverage Social Media to Surprise and Delight
Customers 160

Systemize Thoughtfulness—The Mendlowski Method 162

Ensure Customers Get a Consistent Experience 163

Give Attention to Get Attention 164

Peloton: The Poster Child for Intentional Attention 166

Endnotes 170

Index 177

List of Illustrations

- 1.1 The Over Trilogy Cycle 7
- 2.1 Intentional Attention 36
- 2.2 Attention Pays Framework 48



A Love Note From Neen

G'Day, (that's Aussie for hello)

You're pretty cool for reading a dedication and not skipping ahead, thanks for doing that.

The book you're holding is the result of hours of conversations, hundreds of presentations to amazing audiences, and much laughter (admittedly a few tears), and now I am setting it free in the world. That's a little scary. The reason for writing this book is to get the world to truly pay attention to each other, and not everyone gets that. But you do. Maybe that's why you picked up this book?


I want you to look up at the magnificent world around you and really notice people. I want you to take a moment and look someone deeply in the eyes. I want you to pause, take a breath, and be right here in this very moment.

I want everyone to feel seen and heard. I don't want anyone to ever feel invisible.

You're my favorite for investing in this book. Yes, you. Thank you for investing your precious attention in reading and sharing it with others.

You are the most important person right now.


My deepest appreciation extends to my incredible clients and audiences that have invited me to stand in service of them and share perspectives and stories. Thank you all for sharing inspiring notes, posts on social media and comments on how you have applied these attention strategies in your lives—my life is richer because of you.



My deep love and admiration goes to the people listed here who have inspired, challenged, and supported me in this process. Yes, it's risky to share a list knowing I might forget someone. I adore these people.

- My Andy ~ balancing my crazy 'all-in' with your calm. You are my world.
- Meg ~ You are my person. Everyone needs someone as loyal, authentic, smart, funny and caring as you. You know everything.
- My family ~ in both countries, for constant encouragement.
- Maria ~ can't do life without you.
- Misty ~ your friendship and prayers. I am forever grateful.
- Candy ~ may there be more soufflé moments, cocktails and kaftans.
- Eileen ~ walk and talks are the best therapy, you keep me grounded.
- Donovan ~ I will forever listen with my eyes because of you.
- Patrick, Judson, Stacey, Jon ~ you help me think differently, giggle loudly and celebrate everything.
- Tami ~ You are remarkable and you are a gift to me.
- Michael ~ thinking and performing bigger, because of you—thank you for being my advocate.

- 
- Scott ~ your friendship and community continue to elevate everything. Speak and Spill is my business family.
 - Mark ~ you changed the direction of my business and challenge me daily.
 - Simon ~ you inspired me to create an attention movement.
 - Tamsen ~ helping find my red thread and inspiring me to be smarter—you are a great accountability partner.
 - JJ ~ your constant encouragement and reminder 'It's You against You' thank you for being my cheerleader.
 - Theo ~ Your gifts of compassion, generosity, and discernment make the world a better place. Amazing.
 - Clay ~ your clarity is a gift to the world, your friendship and your brain are a gift to me. This book is better because of you and all our virtual writing dates.
 - Phil ~ listening, encouraging and being on the crazy journey with me.
 - Juli ~ your magnificent ability to find gems in the craziness of my thoughts will forever astound me; you made my words come to life.
 - Joey ~ in one conversation, you changed everything, I adore you.
 - Nido ~ you are my role model of intentional attention. Your impact and influence has a ripple effect across the planet.



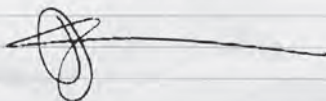
If you have made it all the end of
this indulgent thank-you list, yay you!

Don't wait for a project like this, or a life-changing situation to remind someone they mean something to you. Take a moment today, make a call, send a text, write a love note, call a customer to thank them, and reach out to someone and acknowledge the impact they make or have made on you.

Let's pay more
attention together.

When you pay attention, attention pays.

♡ —Neen James



About the Author

Think force of nature. Boundless energy. Dubbed the *Energizer bunny* by event planners worldwide, she's a highly rated keynote speaker and sassy little Aussie. With a down-to-earth style, contagious enthusiasm, and sharp business mind, Neen has also authored three books including *Folding Time™* and contributed to four books. She is a regular contributor to industry publications and online forums, as well as a sought-after thought leader in productivity and attention.

Her company provides high-energy keynotes and executive mentoring. Clients describe her as fun, real, energetic, and wicked smart. Neen is happily married, a self-proclaimed champagne taste tester, shoe-loving, proud godmother of Maddie and Ava.

Learn more at neenjames.com.

Introduction

DOES YOUR ATTENTION PAY?

Are you tired of constantly being busy but not productive?

Do you run from one meeting to the next, yet never feel like you achieve results?

Do you feel overwhelmed, overstressed, and overtired?

Are your personal and professional lives suffering because you can't devote quality time and attention to either?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you're not alone.

For more than 15 years, I've worked with leaders and professionals in a multitude of industries. Almost every client I work with lists these same concerns within minutes of our first meeting. They all have something else in common, too—the desire to move past their overwhelmed, overstressed, and overtired existence and lead a more fulfilled, productive, and intentional life.

Do you want that, too?

I think most of us do. Yet that possibility seems forever out of reach in a world that constantly demands more from us. It's frustrating when we feel like we work so hard to create a lifestyle for the people we love, and yet we aren't getting enough time with those we care about.

INTRODUCTION

Many clients share with me that they don't feel valued at work, and some share they feel the same at home. That makes my heart sad. I want to fix that, and that is the driving force behind my work and this book.

My clients also tell me they simply don't have enough time in the day to "get it all done." Can you relate? If so, I will give you the same tough love I give my clients:

You don't have a time management crisis; you have an attention management crisis.

In my work, I show leaders how to be highly productive and achieve lasting work-life integration. (I don't believe in the work-life balance myth! More on that later.) It seems there is one fundamental characteristic that too many of today's leaders are lacking: the ability to give their undivided attention to whom and what matters most at that moment.

I'm not talking half-hearted, kinda listening, multitasking, doing something on your phone attention. I mean deliberate, fully present, look-them-in-the-eye type of attention.

I see this same attention crisis everywhere I look—in our homes, in our workplaces, in our communities. We think we're paying attention but we're not. As individuals, professionals, and communities, our genuine engagement has dramatically declined. Our attention is being wasted—stolen by technology, constant interruptions, and our own habits.

We have become an attention-deficit society.

We now accept *distracted* as the norm. We are so focused on technology, our never-ending to-do list, and our lack of time, we fail to pay attention to the people, priorities, and passions that are truly important to us. We are more connected than any time in history and yet more disconnected from ourselves, from each other, from our work, and from our world than ever before.

You know what I am talking about. I know you see it, too. No one truly pays attention anymore.

THE COSTS OF INATTENTION

You might be sitting there thinking, “Really? Attention? Is it that important?”

Yeah, actually it is.

As you’ll discover in Chapter 1, the cost of our inattention is real and the consequences are enormous. And I don’t mean just financial costs. There are tangible personal, professional, and societal costs to our individual and collective lack of attention.

At a personal level, our health, our relationships, and our opportunities for career advancement suffer significantly when we don’t give thoughtful attention to ourselves and the people we care about most. Professionally, lack of attention has a dramatic negative impact on our productivity, employee engagement, sales, and bottom-line results. Globally, our carelessness has led to irreparable harm to our natural resources, plant and animal species, and the planet itself.

The price we are paying for our inattention is far too great.

You get just one life to lead. How do you want to spend that life? Overwhelmed, overstressed, and overtired? Or joyful, productive, and attentive? Are you squandering the amazing talents and skills you possess because you can’t stay focused at work? We have only one planet to care for. What kind of legacy and world are we leaving to our grandchildren?

You may think you are paying attention, but are you giving *intentional attention*? You may think you are doing work that matters, but maybe you’re not. You may think you make people feel like they matter, but do they really?

It’s not that we don’t want to pay attention. We really are trying.

- We believe *connecting* with friends and family through social media creates authentic, meaningful connections.

INTRODUCTION

- We think survival by multitasking is our only option.
- We are trying to be all things to all people.
- We feel that we have to be accessible to everyone all the time.
- We create mindfulness programs at work.
- We go to time-management training programs.
- We create never-ending to-do lists.
- We spend more time prioritizing our to-do lists than actually doing our to-do lists!
- We try new fancy planners.
- We download the latest app.
- We color code our calendars.
- We read anything we can get our hands on about how to get it all done.

And yet, we still feel frustrated.

We are missing something when it comes to understanding attention.

INTENTION IS WHAT MAKES ATTENTION VALUABLE

Have you ever thought about the value of paying attention?

Attention sometimes gets a bad rap in today's society. Perhaps that is because we've come to associate the concept of attention with unrelenting selfies that scream *look at me* and the constant sharing of every detail of one's life on social media. That is not the type of attention I am talking about. The type of attention I want to share with you in this book is the *intentional attention* that will help you show up as the best version of yourself in all roles in your life.

INTRODUCTION

We all want and need attention. It's one of our most basic human desires. From our earliest moments as infants, our most basic needs of food, shelter and nurturing are provided by our parents' attention. As adults, the love and acceptance we all crave is granted by others' attention to us.

We don't all need the same kind of attention. It doesn't even have to be a lot of attention—just attention from the people who are important to us. We want to feel that we are the center of somebody's attention, even if we don't want to be the center of everybody's attention.

Attention is critical in our jobs, too. We need focused attention from our leaders and our employees to get work done, to achieve results, to succeed. Our customers and our teams need attention, too. People want to be seen and heard and know that their concerns are being addressed.

Attention is not optional; it's vital. *It is attention that drives the results we all want and need.*

Perhaps this is why we hear all the time, "Pay attention!" Our parents told us to pay attention. Our teachers told us to pay attention. We tell our kids to pay attention. It's a valuable life lesson.

The issue is that most of us are giving distracted, unfocused attention (like texting while having a conversation). That kind of attention is worthless. It sends the message that the focus of our attention has little real value, meaning, or importance to us.

Intention is what makes attention valuable.

Intentional attention is active. It involves seeing, hearing, and thinking about who is with you and what needs your focus right now. It requires us to choose consciously, act deliberately, and invest transformationally with our attention. That is the essence of Attention Pays—*intentionally investing your attention in what matters at the moment: the people you are talking to, the priorities you are acting on, and the passions you are pursuing.*

INTRODUCTION

Just as you must first invest your money before you can expect any return, you have to first give attention in order to receive the benefits. We have to give attention to get attention. How can you manage and invest your attention so that it pays? That is the question we are going to answer in this book.

Now before you start thinking this is a narcissistic, hedonistic book about how you can manipulate others to get what you want, just stop. Attention Pays is not about giving to get. Giving others the authentic, deliberate attention they need is transformational—for them and for you. When you meet others' needs, yours will naturally be met, too.

When you give the people, priorities, and passions in your life your undivided attention, in the moment, you reap lasting rewards. When companies give attention first to their team members, clients, and customers, they get the attention they want and need for their products and services. This is not because they are trying to manipulate, but because they stand out among their competitors. And when we give the planet our committed attention, we ensure it will take care of us in the future.

Intentional attention is a gift—one you give the people in your world, and one you give yourself.

AN ATTENTION REVOLUTION

Through my research, study, and work with clients such as Viacom, Comcast, Paramount Pictures, Trinity Health, and Johnson & Johnson Pharmaceuticals, I've seen the power of intentional attention. I've repeatedly witnessed firsthand the extraordinary difference even slight shifts in attention can create in people's lives. That is why the concept of intentional attention is the underpinning of my business practice, my strategy development, and my passion for helping people get from where they are to where they want to be.

INTRODUCTION

My personal mission is to dismantle our attention-deficit society and create an attention-surplus economy.

I want the world to stop the “crazy” and pay attention to each other and create more significant moments that matter.

I want to inspire an Attention Revolution to help each of us to move past busyness into productiveness, to make genuine connections and deepen our relationships, to accelerate results and to achieve lasting work–life integration.

I want you to look up at the magnificent world around you and really notice people. I want you to take a moment and look someone deeply in the eyes. I want you to pause, take a breath, and be right here in this very moment.

I want everyone to feel seen and heard. I don’t want anyone to ever feel invisible.

Will you join me?

As an executive, leader, parent, business owner, coach, entrepreneur, board member, or all the other roles you fill each day, you can choose how you will invest your attention, time, and energy:

- *Personally—Be Thoughtful* as an individual.
- *Professionally—Be Productive* as an individual and leader.
- *Globally—Be Responsible* for your community and your world.

Together, let’s create an Attention Revolution so that those you spend time with at work, home, and in your community will know that they matter to you.

ATTENTION PAYS

Intentional attention is like currency. When you invest it wisely, it pays meaningful, long-term dividends. By intentionally and deliberately paying attention to who and what

INTRODUCTION

matters, we get the results we want at work, at home, and in our communities. Might it be difficult? You bet! But the ROA—*return on attention*—is huge!

One of the biggest returns on your intentional attention is the creation of truly defining moments, not just for you, but for others. My wish for you is that you design a life filled with significant moments you will remember, share, and celebrate and that those moments will include the people you love at home and the people you care for at work. I want you to be proud of your successes and create experiences in the world you will never forget.

Creating significant moments is just the start. Intentional attention pays in so many other ways.

How Well Does Your Attention Pay?

Find out right now by taking our quick, free online questionnaire at neenjames.com/extras

Personally

- Deepen relationships
- Achieve work–life integration
- Find greater purpose and meaning
- Create more meaningful memories
- Increase wealth

Professionally

- Create laser focus
- Boost productivity
- Accelerate results
- Increase profitability

INTRODUCTION

- Enhance accountability
- Grow client/customer base and sales
- Improve client/customer satisfaction and loyalty
- Enrich team dynamics and improve morale
- Attract and retain top talent
- Get promoted
- Heighten employee engagement

Globally

- Spread respect and kindness for others
- Protect vital resources
- Honor our environment
- Leave a lasting legacy

We all have responsibilities at work, home, and in our community to pay attention. How well does your attention pay?

ATTENTION IS YOGA FOR YOUR MIND

Why is it that despite the fact we've been told from childhood to pay attention, we still haven't figured it out? It's not that we aren't smart. It's that so many other things are constantly competing for our attention, and all that competition leads to endless distractions and interruptions.

This book will show you how to change your focus, change your habits, and change your brain so you can pay attention to what matters and make your attention pay. You'll learn how to be intentional with who gets your attention, be productive in what gets your attention, and be responsible for the impact of your attention. I'll give you specific strategies that you can put to use immediately at work and at home. You'll discover how

INTRODUCTION

these strategies have paid off for other leaders like you. And of course, we will have fun chatting along the way, and you will learn way more about me than maybe even my mum knows. (Yes, that's how we spell *mum* in Australia—before any of you want to let me know there is a spelling error in my book!)

I can't change your brain, but you can. That might mean you need to stop some of your behaviors. It might mean you will feel uncomfortable reading through some suggestions. But my wish for you is that you will find new ways to not just pay attention, but also to aspire to attentiveness.

By the time you finish this book (if you make it all the way to the end), you will be more intentional with your attention—*if* you are willing to put in some effort. Every. Single. Day. Intentional attention is a skill you can build just like you build a muscle, but it takes practice.

Have you ever done yoga? If so, have you heard the instructor say, “Yoga is a daily practice.” Think of attention as yoga for your mind. Intentional attention is a deliberate, daily practice. The more you do it, the better you get at it. And it's so worth it. How do I know? Because like you, attention is a daily practice for me. I am a work in progress. The only difference is that maybe I have been practicing a bit longer than you.

We need to come to the mat each day, ready to work with the body and mind we have, to get the strength we need to achieve great things.

Let's choose to truly pay attention to what matters so we can be happier in our relationships, more fulfilled in the work we do, and safer in the world we have created. This way we can create meaning, create success, and create a legacy.

Let's pay more attention together. Ready?

PART ONE

Does Your Attention Pay?

CHAPTER 1

Our Attention-Deficit Society

Have you ever heard someone say, “I have ADD today”?

ADD (attention-deficit disorder) has become a catchphrase for laziness, often used as an excuse for procrastination, lack of productivity, being easily distracted, not paying attention, and not completing tasks. People seem to wear it like a badge of honor, which is odd if you think about it.

ADD and ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) are true disorders that require medical treatment. They are physiological, biochemical disorders that make it hard for a person to stay focused and pay attention, thus limiting their ability to perform to their full potential.

When I say that we have become an *attention-deficit society*, I don't say it lightly. One of my family members was diagnosed with ADD in 1992, and I have seen the impacts of this firsthand. But I use this phrase intentionally to drive the point home that there is an epidemic of inattention in our

OUR ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

world—a widespread, serious condition that has real consequences. Consider the following:

- Nine people die every day and 1,153 people are injured because of distracted driving. These are not just nameless, faceless people. These are partners, mothers, fathers, children, siblings, and friends. Possibly yours.
- The death count of pedestrians in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is steadily rising due to distracted walking. They have a light rail system, and people are so absorbed with their cell phones they don't even see a train coming at them!
- According to a study by the Information Overload Group, \$588 billion is lost every year in U.S. businesses alone because of interruptions.
- In a study of 2,000 respondents, *Think Money* found a total of 759 hours (that's 31 days!) in lost time every year due to distractions.
- Since the year 1900, about 477 different species have become extinct because of our inattention to our environment and the destruction of natural habitats.
- The Global Nonrenewable Natural Resource Scarcity Assessment found that 23 of the 26 (88%) nonrenewable natural resources it analyzed will likely experience permanent global supply shortfalls by the year 2030.

Our inattention has real, often lasting, and sometimes devastating consequences. We think we are paying attention, but we aren't. We are allowing other people, devices, and circumstances to control our attention.

Those with true ADD don't have a choice in how well they pay attention. The rest of us do. We don't have ADD; we have IBC—*inattention by choice*. We have control of our brains,

INTERNAL FACTORS

our thought processes, and our habits. Stop thinking that you have no power over your inattention and lack of productivity. Nothing could be further from the truth.

So, how did we get here? How did we become an attention-deficit society?

It's not because we're not smart or because we don't care, but because so many other things are competing for our attention, both online and offline. The causes of the attention-deficit society are both internal and external forces. Our fast paced, device-dependent, hyperconnected world is speeding up, not slowing down. We have so many distractions and decisions, we can't focus in the moment for a minute.

Let's take a closer look at each of these internal and external factors.

INTERNAL FACTORS

Our internal world is a significant factor in our struggle to pay attention. Our beliefs, our feelings, our health, and even our generation play a role in how well we pay attention.

The Great Multitasking Myth

In our modern world, the number of things that demand our attention has dramatically increased. We are being pulled in so many different directions and being asked to produce better results faster and with fewer resources. Our solution has been to multitask or *manic-task*, as I call it. I've been guilty of this—frantically switching between screens, paper, calls, and to-do lists in an attempt to get it all done.

For years, we've been told that multitasking was the way to be more efficient and productive. Too bad it's not true. The reality is we are multitasking more yet achieving less. We are busy, but not productive. We still feel like we can't get it all done. Don't you feel that? And it's stressful, right?

OUR ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

The idea that multitasking will help us get more done is a myth. As a result of numerous studies and neuroscience research, we now know that the brain is incapable of performing multiple tasks simultaneously (yes, including talking and texting). Rather than multitasking, the brain is rapidly shifting from one task to another. And each time the brain switches tasks, it has to go through a start-stop-start process. Some estimates suggest that productivity goes down by as much as 40% to 50% when we task switch. Other studies have found that because this task switching increases the cognitive load on our brains, it also increases the chances of making mistakes and missing important information and cues, as well as hinders problem solving and creativity.

In his book *Free*, Chris Anderson, founder of TED Talks and editor-in-chief of *Wired* magazine, asked the reader, “Does multitasking just slice the same attention more finely?”

The answer is *yes*. We are splitting our attention in many different directions, giving a piece of our attention here, a piece there, and another piece over there. As a result, nothing is getting our true attention and everything is getting short-changed. We need to replace our manic-tasking with single-tasking or *sane-tasking*, as I call it—staying sane while focusing our attention on the important conversation, proposal, or project at hand until it is completed.

Which do *you* do more of—manic-tasking or sane-tasking?

The “Over Trilogy”—Overwhelmed, Overstressed, and Overtired

I imagine you are a high achiever. You want more, you hustle, you want to be at the top, have the best team, achieve the president’s award, or get a fantastic rating on your annual performance review. You want it all. Many of us do. But that leads to a dangerous condition that I call the “Over Trilogy”—the fact

INTERNAL FACTORS

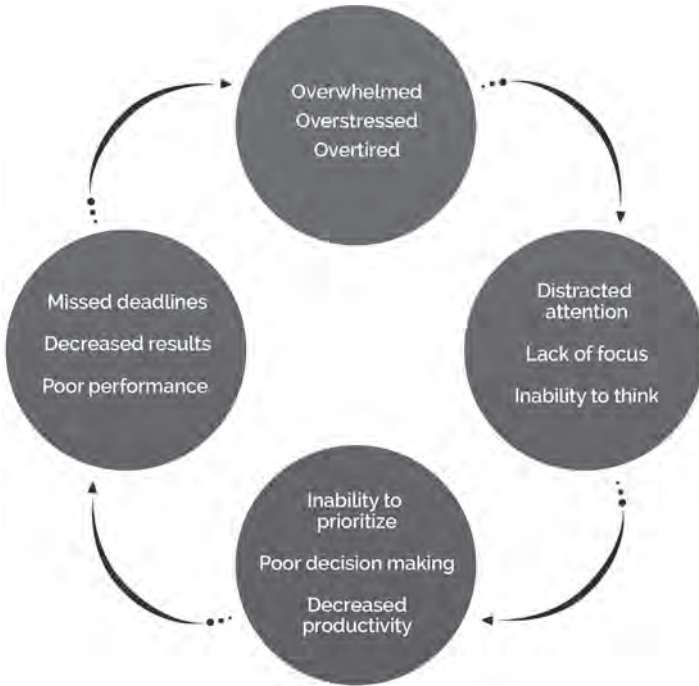


Figure 1.1. The Over Trilogy Cycle

that too many of us are constantly overwhelmed, overstressed, and overtired.

We feel constantly overwhelmed as our responsibilities at work and at home continue to grow. We attempt to answer emails between meetings, eat on the run living on protein bars, create some structure for our teams, respond to the boss, and then look after our family. Our boss has expectations of us, our partners have different expectations, and then we have expectations of ourselves about what we can achieve. We want so much more in life, but we don't know where to begin.

If you are like most of the leaders I work with, you are more stressed than ever before. And you're not alone.

OUR ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

A recent study conducted by the American Psychological Association found that average stress levels in the United States rose yet again from 4.9 to 5.1 on a 10-point stress scale. In addition, 24% of adults reported being extremely stressed, compared to 18% a year earlier.

Chronic stress impairs our ability to shift our attention. A 2009 study of stressed-out medical students found that stress affects the attention-regulating area of the prefrontal cortex of the brain. The study's author shared, "It's reassuring that this attention-shifting deficit seems to go away after the stress is reduced, but such deficits are similar to what we see in some stress-related psychiatric disorders."

More than that, stress is a silent killer. We can't see it or touch it or smell it. But we can see the impacts of it. Chronic stress is linked to the six leading causes of death (heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide), and more than 75% of all physician office visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints.

Constantly feeling overwhelmed and overstressed leads to being overtired. Too many of us (yes, I'm guilty of it, too) are living an around-the-clock schedule, staying up too late or getting up too early in a futile effort to get it all done. Chronic lack of sleep impacts our mental alertness, productivity, attitude, and emotions. But it can also lead to serious medical conditions and shorten life expectancy.

Even if we make it into the bed at a reasonable hour, how often do we lie in bed tossing and turning, letting overwhelm and overstress take over our minds? I often refer to the overwhelm and overstress combination as *Chip*, like a chip on your shoulder (apologies to my friend whose real name is Chip). I think of Chip as this vicious green gremlin who visits late at night. He taunts you relentlessly, reminding you of everything you didn't get done today. He's ugly, and he distracts you.

INTERNAL FACTORS

What does the Over Trilogy have to do with attention? Everything! Being overwhelmed, overstressed, and overtired impacts our health and our relationships. A constant level of overwhelm, stress, and fatigue deeply affects our attention and takes up valuable real estate in our brain, thus negatively impacting the way our brain processes information. This leads to decreased productivity and eventually decreased results, which triggers even more feelings of being overwhelmed, overstressed, and overtired. The result is a never-ending, vicious cycle.

It's time to punch Chip in the face, tell him he's not welcome, and decide that you are done being overwhelmed, overstressed, and overtired. It's no way to live. Instead, choose to live a meaningful life filled with significant moments.

Generational Differences

I speak to a lot of people every year. People think I can't see them in the audience because of the lights, but I can. In fact, I make it a habit to observe whether my audience members are paying attention to me. (The responsibility is on me, the speaker, to keep them engaged. The same is true for any speaker, or any leader for that matter.) I've noticed some differences that seem to run along generational lines. You would likely notice the same differences if you observed the audience at your CEO's annual presentation or groups of friends sitting around tables at a restaurant.

The older generations will put their devices away and look at the speaker or at each other. Now, that doesn't mean they are paying attention! They could be thinking about problems at work, problems at home, what they're going to say next, or running through the to-do lists in their head.

The younger generations have their phones out, typing away, perhaps tweeting a great quote from the CEO, or posting a picture of their entrée. Older generations tend to believe

OUR ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

younger generations are being rude when they are on their phones in the company of others. Younger generations would never be offended by someone being on a phone in their presence. They are just excited to spread the latest news, whatever that may be.

Both older and younger generations likely think they are paying attention. Both probably aren't.

But their perceptions of their own and others' attention are very different. Those who grew up before the advent of the internet and smartphone likely know how to give someone undivided attention, how to be present in the moment during a special event, or how to focus on a task for more than a few minutes. But like any good skill, if you don't use it, you lose it. Those who grew up in the digital age have never known anything other than a multitasking, multiscreen, always-connected existence.

The youngest generation is growing up on a full-time diet of technology, electronics, and social media almost from the time they are infants. Their babysitters are watching movies on a tablet and playing games on smartphones. According to a study performed by the International Center for Media & the Public Agenda, most children and teens spend 75% of their waking lives with their eyes fixed on a screen. It remains to be seen if their brains will actually be wired differently than the brains of older generations. In the meantime, we know the brain can't do two things at once.

I recently had a conversation with my incredibly talented 21-year-old neighbor about attention and his generation. He said when his generation meets with people who are older than them, they don't tend to be on their devices out of respect. (Except with their parents—they think that's very different.) It was fascinating. That tells me that, despite what younger generations tell us about their ability to pay attention to more than one thing at time, deep down they know it isn't true.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Whichever generation you resonate with, we need to understand not all generations see attention the same way as us. Let's focus on how we can be better at paying attention, regardless of the generation to which we belong.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Our beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and even our age affect our ability to pay attention. But our inattention is not just an inside job. There are external influences that compromise our attention, as well.

Physical Environment

If you are sitting at your desk right now, look up. Take a good look around you. Do you have paper everywhere? Big piles of things to do? A full physical inbox of projects needing your input, journals that need reading, or proposals that need responding to? When you look at your computer screen, do you have a huge email inbox that you use as your to-do list?

When you arrive home after work, can you park your car in your garage? Or is the space filled with boxes and projects and reminders of things you *have to do*?

Our physical environment affects our ability to achieve results. If it feels out of control, disorganized, and chaotic, we are less likely to know where to focus first.

Open-plan environments are another physical factor that can dramatically impact our attention and productivity. Open-plan environments are popular and beneficial for teams with high collaboration, and allow a larger number of people in one space. Many successful organizations have moved to this model including Facebook, Cisco, Microsoft, Google, and eBay.

While companies will not go back to offices any time soon, we need to understand as leaders that an open-plan environment creates massive distractions for all team members

OUR ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

and impacts productivity negatively. Their attention will be split, their phone calls will be heard, their sales will be affected, and team morale will be impacted.

You can make open-plan work only with training, guidelines, and old-fashioned good manners and thoughtful team members.

Visit neenjames.com to download my free 10-Day Open Plan Productivity Action Plan and Open Plan Survival Tips.

The Survival Tips can be found directly at neenjames.com/extras.

How the Media and Information Overload Changed Our Attention

If you didn't pay attention as a caveman or cave woman, you just might get eaten by a saber-toothed tiger or pick the wrong berries to eat. That was good incentive to know what was happening around you. Paying attention was critical to survival. Fortunately for our early ancestors, they didn't have TV and other modern technologies to distract them!

Over time, people began to multiply, explore new areas, and build and live in larger communities. With the invention of tools and resources to make people's lives easier, attention shifted from survival to communication, trade, and learning about the world.

Just 80 years ago, families stopped what they were doing to gather around the radio to hear the news that was impacting their world. With limited information, everyone gave that information their undivided attention.

With the invention of the television, our world exponentially expanded, but information was still generally limited

EXTERNAL FACTORS

to one daily print edition of the newspaper and a few daily television newscasts. When I was a child, TV was a treat. It had a place in our home, but it wasn't on all day. When my husband and I got married, we didn't own a TV for the first two years and we loved that. We made a conscious choice not to have a television; newlyweds have far more interesting things to do!

Today, with almost unlimited cable and satellite channels, people can tune into the news—or any other channel for that matter—24 hours a day. I have stayed with friends at their homes (or even sharing a hotel room) and the first thing they do when they wake up is turn on the TV. Now, we eat with the TV or phone or other device instead of with people.

When Netflix began creating shows that allowed every episode to be available at once (instead of waiting from one week to the next), we changed our viewing habits. Binge-watching is one of the latest ways media steals our attention. The Diffusion Group (TDG) published research findings on exstreamist.com that we spend more time watching Netflix than eating, reading, or having sex!

But that's not the end of it. Now, we get our news and entertainment through screens and apps on our devices. We can google anything and there is a YouTube video for how to do everything. I heard the news that Michael Jackson died on Twitter. I often learn about world events on Facebook posts or tweets from those in affected areas. Social media has changed the way we receive breaking news; it has created millions of unofficial journalists sharing stories from all over the world and it has created skeptical viewers now that *fake news* has become a real issue.

According to Adrian Ott, one of Silicon Valley's most respected strategists and the author of the book *The 24-Hour Customer*, we see more than 34 billion bits of information per day online. That is the equivalent of two books a day! And all

OUR ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

that information creates pressure on what she calls *the attention bottleneck*—the imbalance between the rate of information growth relative to the fixed constraint of time. She explains,

In 16 waking hours a day, people can only comprehend a finite amount of what's thrown at them. The information coming into the top of the funnel is growing at an increasing rate while the intake at the bottom remains fixed, adding pressure to the attention bottleneck This dynamic has driven an attention arms race where it feels like we are in Times Square with lights flashing and noise blaring all the time, no matter where we are. The kind of discipline required to shut out the world and avoid multitasking with all the electronic temptations at our fingertips is significantly greater than in the past.

In addition, advertisers have become incredibly savvy at manipulating our attention. Leveraging technology that measures brain activity and heart rate, as well as tracks eyeballs to see what colors, messages, and images cause emotional reactions, they can design campaigns that get and keep our attention.

Our exposure to choices and information is much greater than in our parents' time. With information overload, it seems no one pays much attention to anything. Herbert Simon, a social scientist in 1971, said, "A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention." Wise words.

Our Technology Addiction

Have you ever been at a wedding (or even worse, a funeral) and heard a cell phone ring? I don't care who you are or what message someone is trying to get to you. Nothing about this is okay.

In our attention-deficit society, we have become hyper-focused on our smartphones, smart devices, social media,

EXTERNAL FACTORS

and text messaging, rather than on who or what is important in the moment. We have made technology more important than people.

My talented friend and sales and leadership speaker Connie Podesta shared a story with me. She and a friend had agreed to meet but only had 60 minutes due to their busy schedules. When the time was over, the friend had spent 50% of that time on her cell phone and responding to messages. Her friend lamented their time had come to an end but commented on how good it had been to catch up. My brave and fabulous friend Connie replied, “It would have been nice to catch up, but you spent half the time on your phone.”

We have all come to accept people being on devices while in conversation as normal and acceptable. It’s not! We need more people like Connie—willing to point out the truth about our obsession with our devices and technology. I have been known to say to my honey, “I am more interesting than your phone.” It may sound arrogant as you read it, but it’s true. I am interesting and it makes him laugh.

Have you ever found yourself reaching for your device if a person, or meeting, or a movie didn’t engage you? It’s become our default. Our technology and our devices have become our companionship. Here’s something scary: The International Center for Media & the Public Agenda found that students who unplugged their electronic devices for one 24-hour period felt extremely lonely and didn’t know how to fill their time.

The truth is, we are addicted. And I don’t mean figuratively, I mean literally.

Dr. Nicholas Kardaras, author of *Glow Kids: How Screen Addiction Is Hijacking Our Kids—and How to Break the Trance*, says there’s a very real reason why it’s so hard to coax people away from their devices. “We now know that those iPads, smartphones, and Xboxes are a form of digital drug.

OUR ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

Recent brain imaging research is showing that they affect the brain's frontal cortex—which controls executive functioning, including impulse control—in exactly the same way that cocaine does. Technology is so hyper-arousing that it raises dopamine levels—the feel-good neurotransmitter most involved in the addiction dynamic—as much as sex.”

As much as we may not want to admit that we are addicted to our devices, we know we are. Have you ever left the house without your cell phone? Did you go back to get it? Even if it made you late for work or you missed your train? Of course you did!

The idea of a *digital detox* gives some people heart palpitations. Do you know how many times we touch our cell phones in a day? Take a guess.

Think You're Not Addicted to Technology?

There are numerous apps available that track how much time you spend on your smartphone. You can leverage technology to actually help your attention. Install one and see how much time you are really spending on your phone. I installed one and was shocked at how much time I was wasting on my device. This dependency on our technology is impacting our relationships and our performance. Imagine what your life would be like if you gave the people, priorities, and passions that are important to you half of the attention you give your devices! Do you want to write a book? Imagine if you added to it 2,617 times a day. Imagine what you could achieve if you invested only a third of that time developing a new skill you want to develop?

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Go to neenjames.com/extras for my favorite Attention Resources.

According to a recent Dscout study, the average user touches their cell phone 2,617 time per day! Imagine touching anything—or anyone—that many times a day! If you are an extreme user—someone who is never separated from your device—you might touch your cell phone over 5,400 times per day! That's just crazy!

Now, you might think that I believe technology is the evil enemy of attention. Not at all. Technology is an amazing tool that has become an integral part of societal change. It gets blamed (a lot) for our lack of attention, but when leveraged well, it can help us achieve more in shorter periods of time and create a further reach than we ever thought possible.

But we have willingly given away our power and our control to our devices. We have allowed our devices to dictate our time and our attention, and therefore our lives.

We haven't figure out how to deal with technology's incessant demand on our attention. We haven't learned how to use technology appropriately and still be productive and so our attention is devoured online. We haven't designed the rules or taught people how to behave in the digital age with manners and respect.

Technology, when used wisely, can increase attention and productivity and connectivity. Like any good thing, using technology in moderation is a powerful tool for all of us. We need to leverage technology, not reject it. We need to be disciplined in our use of technology, especially while in the company of the people around us. The key is to use it for good (productivity), and not evil (pure distraction). We get to choose our relationship with technology. We can reclaim

OUR ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

our time and attention, and this book will show you exactly how to do this.

Our Addiction to Social Media and Apps

The first tweet by one of the Twitter founders, Jack Dorsey, sent on March 21, 2006, at 9:50 p.m. read, “just setting up my twttr.” This one action forever changed the status updates for social media. When Twitter launched in July of that year, they could not have begun to imagine the far-reaching impact they would have on the world’s attention.

Twitter and all its social media cousins have become part of our daily attention and conversation—and our obsession. Our addiction to our technology is driven largely by our addiction to social media and apps.

Apps and social media are stealing our attention. We have become obsessed with likes, and retweets, and finding the perfect *gif* response to post. We miss the amazing play or moment at the concert because we are updating our Instagram. We miss the bus because we are enthralled with the latest video on one of our YouTube subscriptions. We miss our floor on the elevator because we were reading Twitter. We miss the green light because we are checking Facebook.

The CEO of a technology and data company recently shared with me his frustration about one of his senior leaders who appeared to be addicted to Candy Crush. In every spare moment, his director was online and had to be counseled twice in one week. The leader tried to explain it was his form of relaxation but after much questioning, he reluctantly admitted that his workload had fallen behind, he had emails in his inbox that hadn’t been answered for five days, and he was two weeks behind in developing a database for a client. Remember, this is a smart, functioning adult.

Maybe you don’t play Candy Crush but you feel a need to check every notification of a new email, text, tweet, or post on

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Facebook or LinkedIn, or maybe you have created Pinterest boards to plan your perfectly designed office or maybe you monitor every like you get on Instagram?

Gut check time: How much of *your* attention is being stolen by apps and social media?

Do we really have to include in our employee policies that people can't play Candy Crush or check social media at work? Possibly. Some of our obsession is driven by habit and some of it by boredom. And it could be that the voyeuristic interest in other people's lives is more exciting than whatever work is in front of us.

But there is more to it than that. The addiction is real. Our impulse to play one more game and check social media is driven by dopamine and the reward center of the brain. A recent study conducted by researchers at Harvard University found that sharing information about ourselves on social media activates the same part of the brain that is associated with the sensation of pleasure, the same pleasure that we get from eating food, getting money, or having sex. Researchers also learned that there is even greater activity in the reward center of the brain when we share our thoughts with family or friends.

People are addicted to likes and other *vanity metrics* (a term coined by Eric Ries, author of the book *The Lean Start-Up*). "It's an endless pursuit of vanity metrics that stroke the ego," says speaker and author of *UnMarketing*, Scott Stratten.

Another factor in our addiction is FOMO—Fear of Missing Out. We have to be on this or that social media network because "everybody" is on this or that social media network. What if we aren't up to date on what our friends are talking about? What if we miss out on the latest news? Even people who don't like social media feel compelled to join because that's where all of their family, friends, and colleagues are spending their time.

OUR ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

Technology and social media companies and app developers also very consciously and intentionally feed our addictions. Tristan Harris, a former Google design ethicist and an executive at Time Well Spent, believes advertisers and these companies are hijacking our brains. He's passionate about this topic. Harris shares that companies are investing millions of dollars in app, screen design, incentives, and advertisements to get and keep our attention.

Mike Elgan, technology and tech culture columnist at *ComputerWorld*, believes, "Social networking is engineered to be as habit-forming as crack cocaine." He points out that social media sites become more addictive every day through developer strategies like notification numbers, click bait, and algorithmic filters: "... the sites are in a war for survival where only the most addictive sites will survive. Meanwhile, our innate human ability to resist this addiction doesn't evolve."

I can hear you now: "Neen, social media and technology allow me to connect with more people more often." In Australia, we have a saying: "Rubbish!" (the equivalent of *bull*****). Let's get real. Liking a friend from high school's vacation picture or responding with an emoji to the news of a death in a former coworker's family is not a real connection.

I'm not trying to bash social media. It can be a powerful way to show someone attention. I give lots of *intentional* attention to family, friends, colleagues, and clients on Facebook and other platforms. It also allows me to connect to my family in Australia, chat with friends around the world, and witness life-changing events for others in real time.

But love it or hate it, there is no denying that social media demands our attention. While we scroll through Facebook, scroll through Instagram stories, and scroll through Twitter, we are mindlessly scrolling through our lives. I doubt anyone will say on their deathbed, "I wish I'd posted one more tweet

EXTERNAL FACTORS

or picture.” But sadly, they just might say, “I wish I’d paid more attention to the people I was with rather than the ones on social media.”

Destruction of the Work-Life Boundary

Many of you reading this book are too young to remember the “old days” when you arrived at your workplace, went to an office, sat at your desk, and looked in your physical inbox where you had a pile of papers that were your tasks to be completed for that day. As a task was completed, it went in the physical outbox or was distributed throughout your organization via a written memo placed in mailboxes in a mailroom. Once your inbox was empty, your work was done and you went home. I know. Sounds crazy, right?

In your personal time, you exercised, pursued hobbies, spent time with your family or friends, ate around the dinner table, and went to your kids’ activities—where you actually paid attention and connected with other parents. You could answer truthfully when your child asked if you saw their big moment. You might occasionally have taken some work or work-related reading home, but there were very clear boundaries between what happened at work and what happened at home. We respected office hours.

And then technology changed our lives. We began using systems like email and instant message, and then pagers. Cell phones, originally purchased for some to make us feel safe or for use in an emergency, made us available to just about anyone at any time of the day or night. Our technology created a prison of sorts. We are now trapped by our accessibility.

We have moved from very clear boundaries between work and home to being always “on.” The 9-to-5 has become 24/7, 365. We have stopped respecting boundaries and time zones. We email at all times of the day and night. We respond

OUR ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

to work requests on weekends. We call in to conference calls when we are on vacation. We watch our kids play sports and sit in on teleconferences. No wonder we are overwhelmed, overstressed, and overtired.

The lines between work life and personal life are blurred, if not gone altogether. We check social media, text messages, and personal email during work hours. We answer work emails during our supposed off time at home, on weekends, and on vacation. The old adage *Leave work at work and home at home*, is a joke.

There was a fundamental shift in the work-life boundary that occurred not long after the smartphone began to get smart. Employers allow employees to work late, work on the weekends, and work slowly the whole time. Leadership has unrealistic expectations that employees should be constantly available. According to the U.S. Travel Association, nearly 20% of managers feel employees who take all earned leave are less dedicated and focused in their jobs. And employees fear their jobs won't be there when they return from a break.

The destruction of the work-life boundary is a huge factor in our attention-deficit society. The problem with always being "on" is that our attention is always constantly split between our work and personal lives. And that means that neither is getting quality attention or quality effort. (Remember the vicious Over Trilogy cycle?, See Figure 1.1)

While technology was the means for the destruction of the work-life boundary, it's not to blame. It's humans that are to blame. We control the tools we use. It's user error. We have to stop the madness!

We all know we can't go back to the old days with a crisp line of demarcation between work and home. The genie is out of the bottle and there is no way he is going back in! But what would happen if we set some boundaries? As organizations, as leaders, and as individuals, we need to make it okay to have

EXTERNAL FACTORS

rest and recovery periods and to recharge our batteries. We need to make it okay to pay attention to what really matters at work when we are there and to what really matters at home when we are there. How much more productive could we be if we focused and paid attention to who and what was important at the appropriate time?

Do you recall when it was bad manners to call someone before 9 a.m. and after 9 p.m.? Did you know about the telemarketing sales law that establishes standards of conduct for telemarketing calls that they can't call you before 8 a.m. or after 9 p.m.? We need to create new rules like this in our organizations. Yes, I'm completely serious. I challenge you to try it and see how much more creative and productive your team becomes.

It's time to stop the insanity and restore some work-life integration. Creating work-life integration is one of the biggest benefits of joining me in my Attention Revolution. You see, I think work-life balance is a myth. Many of us chase work-life balance, and it's like a unicorn; it will never be discovered. The visual of work and life being a set of scales with both sides equal isn't realistic.

I believe in work-life *integration*. What's the difference? Work-life integration is when your environment, emotions, and expectations are what you want them to be. It's creating an environment that works for you. That might mean working from home on a Friday to complete strategic projects.

It's managing your emotions, so you stop feeling guilty about home when you're at work and about work when you're at home. Guilt is a common emotion among executives with whom I work. They feel guilty for staying too long at the office to get things done when they want to be home with their families—the main reason they work as hard as they do. And they feel guilty when they are relaxing

OUR ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

on Sunday night with their family knowing their emails are piling up and waiting to be answered.

Work-life integration means managing expectations of yourself and others. There is no prescription; it's wholly designed by you, for you, and where you are in your career and circumstances. Unlike the mythical work-life balance, work-life integration is real, and you can have it.

THE COSTS OF THE ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

Every day we waste our attention on inconsequential activities without understanding the consequences of our bad investments. There are huge costs when we don't make the choice to be focused with our attention. We will have big problems personally, professionally, and globally if we allow our attention-deficit society to continue.

Personal Costs

- Death—I'm not trying to be dramatic here; I'm trying to be real. When we don't pay attention while we drive, it kills people. Nine people every day. Think about that for a moment. Nine promising lives gone. Nine families changed forever.
- Our health—The consequences of not paying attention are often stress and illness. There are many people who don't take the time and attention their body needs, or their soul needs. I stupidly ignored a condition for three years, just thinking (or hoping) maybe it would go away, maybe it would fix itself, maybe I was just getting older. Finally, it became so extreme the only solution was surgery. Surgery revealed I'd been putting up with a condition I didn't need to endure. I just didn't stop to take care of it.

THE COSTS OF THE ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

- The quality of our relationships—If we do not pay attention to the people who are important to us, they will get their attention somewhere else. One of the reasons for the high rate of divorces and affairs is that people don't feel like they're getting the love and attention they need at home from their partner. So, they go on to find it elsewhere. The cost of sadness and regret are immeasurable.

Professional Costs

- Personal brand—The cost of not paying attention to your personal brand and executive presence could be lost promotions and pay increases and getting passed over for opportunities. If your reputation suffers, you could likely lose influence with your boss, executive leadership, board of directors, or shareholders.
- Customer satisfaction—If you're not listening to your customers, clients, patients, or whomever you serve, they will simply leave and go somewhere else. If you are lucky and they stay, you'll quickly find that their lack of satisfaction leads to increased complaints!
- Productivity—Just because people show up for work physically doesn't mean they are there mentally. When our attention is split, the quality of our work suffers. Interruptions and distractions impact our deliverables and our success rate. It costs significant money to have multiple people in unproductive meetings where little is getting accomplished.
- Team engagement—If you don't take care of your team members, they will leave you to work at another company. In the United States, we lose \$11 billion in employee turnover annually according to the Bureau of National Affairs. Paying attention to attracting and retaining your top talent is a wise investment.

OUR ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

- Sales—The cost of not paying attention to your targets (whether you work for an organization or manage your own company) is missed sales opportunities. And we all know what happens when we miss sales goals.
- Profit—When we don't give intentional attention to and in our business, the bottom line suffers. Customer satisfaction, productivity, team engagement, sales—when they drop off, it all falls to the bottom line.

Global Costs

- Resources—Our precious world resources are disappearing, and it's not just fossil fuels and the like. According to Dr. Upmanu Lall, director of the Columbia Water Center and a leading expert on hydroclimatology, as soon as 2025, large parts of the world could experience perennial water shortages. He says, "On a humanitarian level, the possibilities are as devastating as climate change." Many futurists have even theorized the next world war will be fought over water.
- Species—According to Simon Worrall of National Geographic, many people believe that we are in the midst of the sixth mass extinction in Earth's history. The fifth one was when the dinosaurs went extinct. He says, "More species are becoming extinct today than at any time since dinosaurs were wiped off the face of the Earth by an asteroid 65 million years ago. Today we're losing biodiversity at a similar rate. And this is, of course, an anthropogenic mass extinction. The primary cause is human communities." With every species that goes extinct, we not only endanger the future of our own species, but we destroy something very special that

THE COSTS OF THE ATTENTION-DEFICIT SOCIETY

our grandchildren and their children will never be able to witness.

- Planet—We need to start paying attention to our planet because we are killing it. There are already so many places in the world that will never be the same. As an Australian, I see the Great Barrier Reef, and it breaks my heart to see how global warming has affected the coral reefs and the marine life that I used to take for granted. It's not just the Great Barrier Reef being devastated by our inattention. Look around the world and where you live and you'll find an example. The rainforests and polar ice caps are just two examples.

To be clear, I am not a card-carrying member of Greenpeace (but I do love some of the work they do), and I don't drive a Tesla (although I love them and think they are incredibly sexy cars). But I am passionate about the fact that we have just one planet, and if we continue to take it for granted, we will all pay the price.

If I haven't convinced you yet that we have an attention management crisis on our hands, I'll save you some time—stop reading. There really is no point in reading any further.

On the other hand, if you see the evidence of the attention-deficit society yourself or you think I might just be on to something here, it's time to join the Attention Revolution. Do you really want to just *exist* in an attention-deficit society? Help me start the shift from the attention-deficit society to the *attention-surplus economy*. It doesn't require a huge investment of time or money. It requires us to make a choice. The choice is to be intentional with who, what, and how we spend our attention. We can change this today. Right now. Read on.

Make Your Attention Pay

1. What do you need to change in your physical environment to improve your attention?
2. Do you have a technology addiction you need to address?
3. What work boundaries do you need to set to improve your work-life integration?