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WORKS

ALONE

WORKING TOGETHER

TO IMPROVE FOCUS.



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TENTS

0

p. 4-7

**Executive
Summary**

1

p. 8-11

Introduction

2

p. 12-17

**A New Way
to Look at
Productivity**

3

p. 18-25

**Driven to
Distraction**

4

p. 26-31

**Shake it Up!
Working
together
to improve
productivity**

5

p. 32-35

**Conclusion:
Work
Differently**

6

p. 36-39

Glossary

7

p. 40-41

Sources

EXECU-

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SUM-

MARY

0

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

1 There's no shortage of distraction in today's workplace—work is more collaborative than ever, technology is integral to our lives, and we crave diversion. But there are ways to combat these blockers and make your team more productive.

2 The best way to improve efficiency and focus as a team is not by hiring more people, but by building *better* relationships.

3 Fighting distraction?
Us, too. Eons of evolution have molded the brain to seek out stimuli. But knowing you're predisposed to interruption allows you to use it to your advantage.

4 Helping teams overcome distraction is easier than it looks. Leaders can take small steps to make work more productive and more meaningful, and improve the team's overall well-being.



INTRO-



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We're working more hours than ever before, but it's not enough. To-do lists rarely stop growing, meetings take up the better part of the work day, and Inbox Zero is an elusive dream. If we can't add hours to the day, we'll have to get more out of them. Of course, that's easier said than done: when the average office worker is interrupted every 11 minutes¹, it's impossible to focus on the task at hand or do any deep thinking. If only it weren't for your distracting colleagues and technology, you could finally make some progress. Right?

We've been blaming this constant state of distraction on "information overload," but the dirty little secret is, we're not helplessly battered by new inputs—we seek out distraction. Every incoming text or overheard conversation in your open office, is a novel experience, which your brain encourages you to pursue in search of a reward². Constantly responding to these distractions makes you feel productive—that is, until you look at your to-do list again.

In other words, three immutable truths are preventing you from being more productive:

1
Work is more collaborative than ever.

You need things from other people to accomplish your goals, and they need things from you.

2
Technology is integral to work.

Information can be accessed and exchanged 24/7 and it's not slowing down.

3
Our brains are built to love distraction.

You can only fight against eons of evolution for so long, and any tinkering around the edges comes at a cost.

So if you can't get rid of coworkers, or technology, or the desire to be distracted, how can anyone hope to be productive?

Individual productivity hacks are a good start, but they're not enough. Instead, it's about rallying your team to create an environment and workflow that reduces distractions and allows you all to perform at your best.

Are you ready? Put away your phone and find a comfy spot—print out this guide and read it the old-fashioned way if it helps. If you have any questions, get in touch.

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BUD CADDELL, FOUNDER, NOBL

A NEW
WAY TO
LOOK AT
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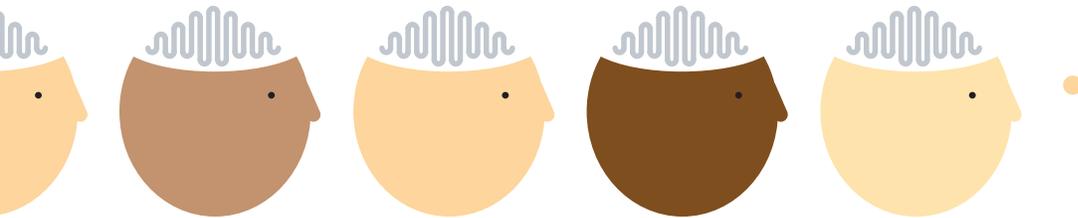
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THE BEST WAY TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY IS TO FOCUS AS A TEAM.



Historically, productivity has been defined as a “ratio between the output volume and the volume of inputs.”³ It’s a useful formula for factories manufacturing widgets, but less helpful in a knowledge economy: what are the inputs? What counts as an output, and should quality impact its score?

THE FIVE KEY TRAITS OF AN EFFECTIVE TEAM

1 Psychological Safety

Individuals felt comfortable sharing ideas without fear of rejection or failure.

2 Dependability

Team members could be counted on to deliver what they said they'd do.

3 Structure & Clarity

Everyone understood what their roles were, and what everyone else on the team was doing.

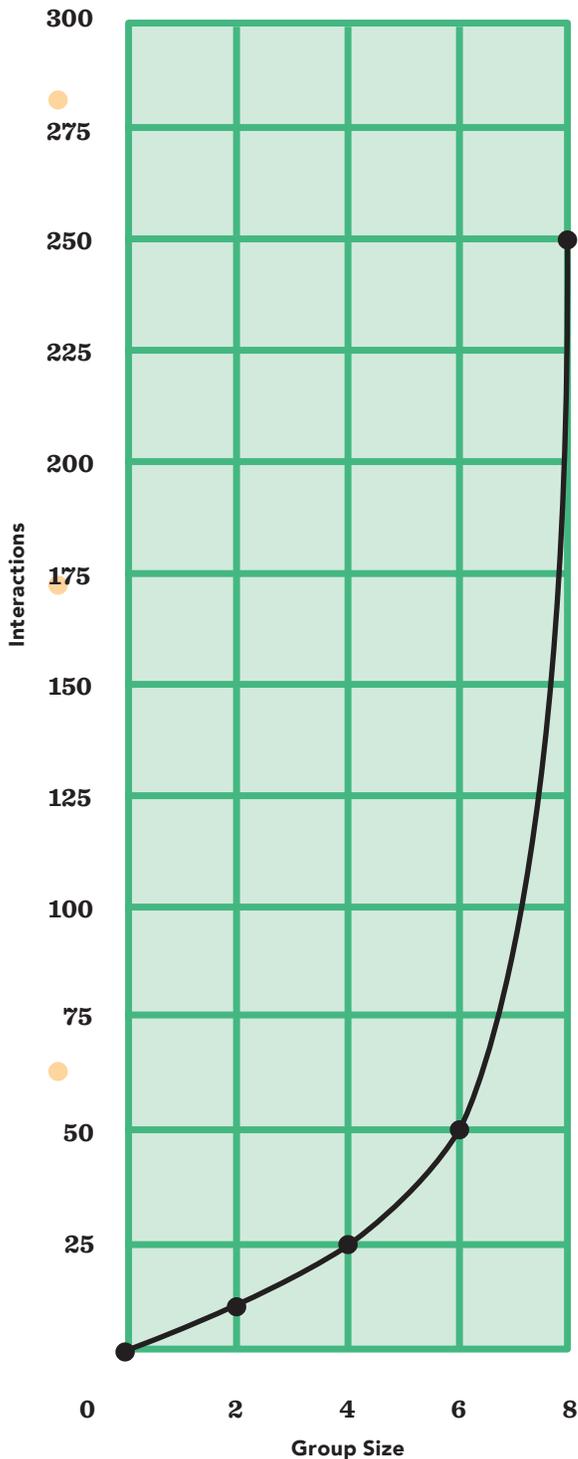
4 Meaning

People felt that their tasks were contributing to the team's larger goals, rather than performing busy work.

5 Impact

The team's work was ultimately making a positive difference in the world.

GROUP DYNAMICS VS. GROUP SIZE



BUSYNESS WILL GET YOU NOWHERE

If you want to improve productivity, you need to be wary of two more distractions: busyness and efficiency. If you're busy, you may be producing a lot of work, but not necessarily your best work. Working efficiently (doing things faster or with less waste) sounds like a much better proposition, but again, doing the wrong things, better, won't help you achieve your goals, either. To make matters worse, if you're focused exclusively on efficiency, you won't have the freedom to experiment, which is vital to inventing new, better ways to work.

The best way to circumvent these traps? Set clear daily and weekly priorities, both individually and as a team. Teams rely on each other to get the work done, so ensuring you're aligned on deadlines and project importance allows you to focus on the right thing at the right time, and forces the team to re-evaluate any "busywork".



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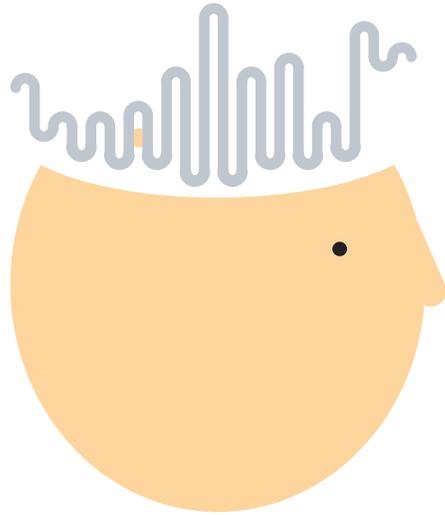
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ITCHING FOR A DIVERSION? US, TOO.

The human brain is wired to seek out stimuli. But knowing you're predisposed to interruption allows you to use it to your advantage.

Team dynamics aren't the only thing holding us back: despite ostensibly being designed to increase productivity, our technology and workplace environments literally drive people to distraction. Facebook's newsfeed is constantly updating, and your office was designed to encourage the conversation you're currently trying to avoid. But there's more to it than just that.

The problem is that humans started as hunter-gatherers⁶ in an environment that couldn't be farther from the modern office. In prehistoric times, distraction was a matter of life and death—noticing a twitch in the grass could mean avoiding being lunch. In this survival-of-the-fittest world, those easily distracted individuals were the ones who passed on their genes to the next generation. So it's no wonder we've invented a million things that purposely drive us to distraction.

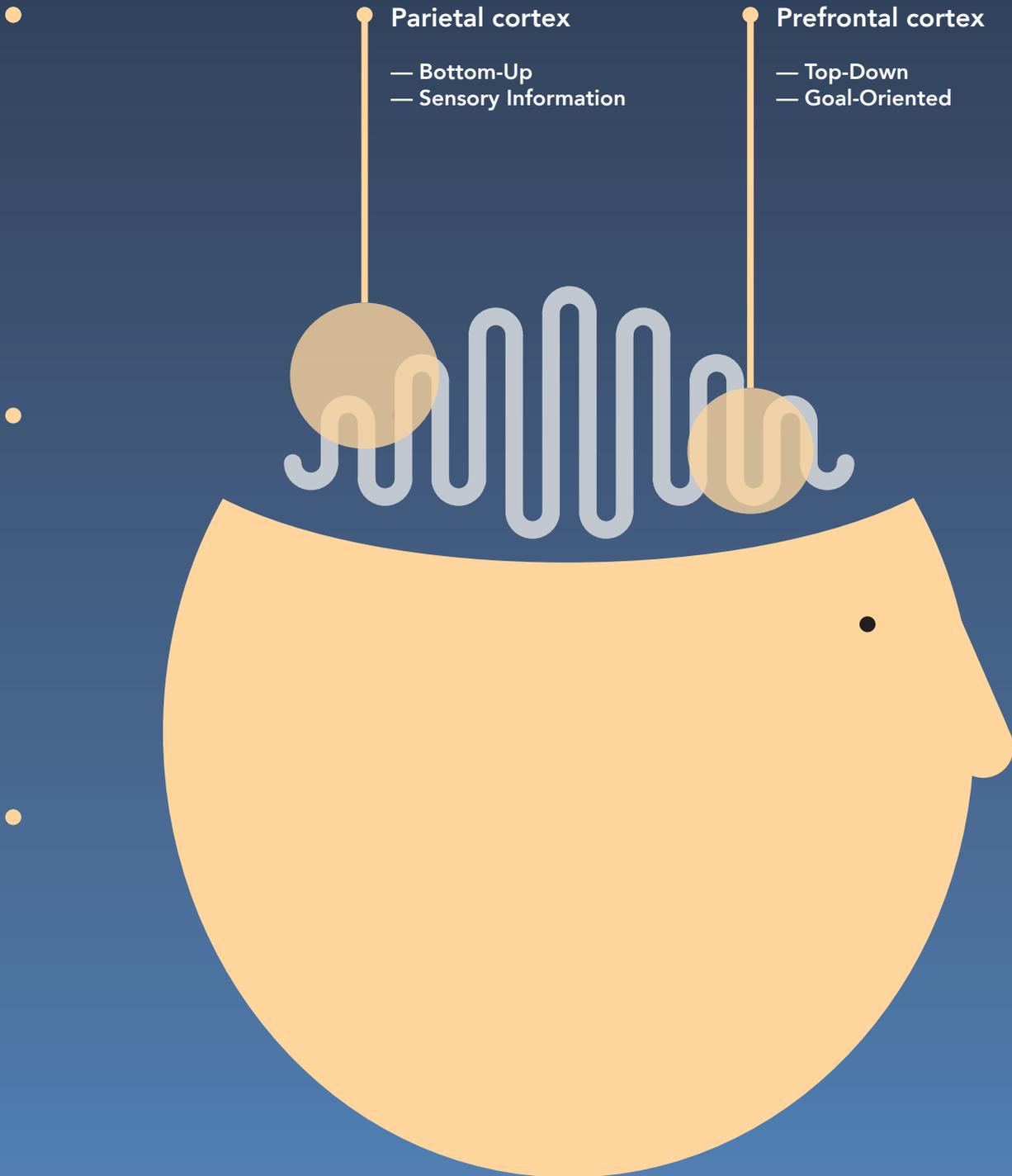
Not only is evolution against us, but so is chemistry. Another reason our brains like to wander? Dopamine. Researchers from Harvard University⁷ found that our brains receive a small dopamine injection every time it "accomplishes" a different task. Which explains why even the smallest thing—checking an email during a meeting—leaves you with a tiny thrill of gratification and enjoyment.

If you think about it, your brain is bombarded by so much information, it's amazing it can focus on anything at all. Right now, you're paying attention to these words, but you're probably also sitting (are you comfortable? Is the room too hot? Too cold?), overhearing music or conversation (Paul Simon on repeat. Your colleague's *Game of Thrones* recap), or wondering what you're going to make for dinner (are there any tomatoes left? Should I pick up wine?). Different parts of your brain are responsible for managing these inputs.

Your brain constantly scans and filters information in an effort to determine what requires the most attention. All this focusing getting to you? You probably want to take a mini-break right now, scroll through Twitter, check Instagram, tackle a quick email. It's normal.

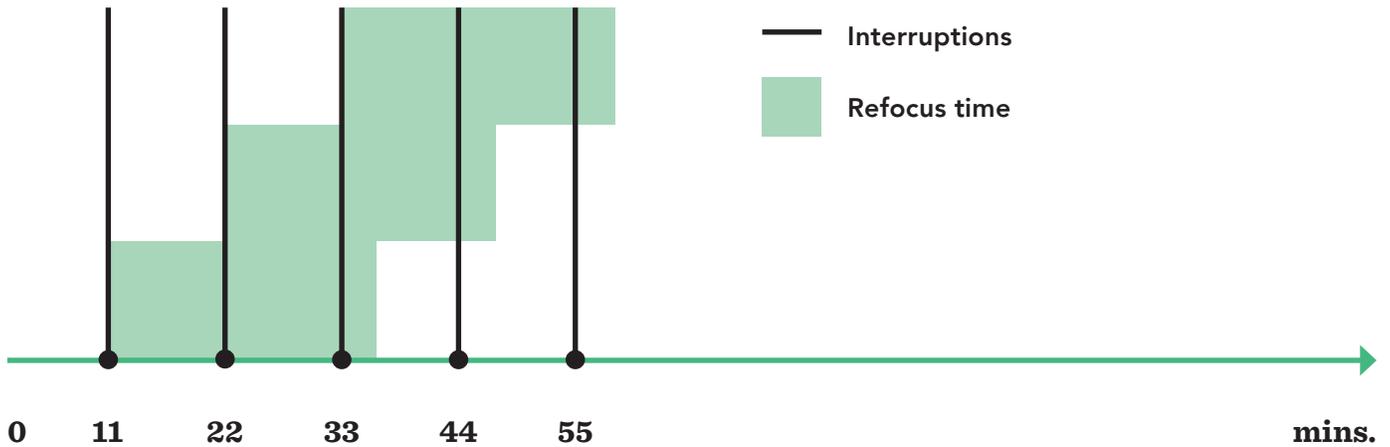
No matter how many things you're thinking or doing at once your brain's job is figuring out what needs the most attention, it's excellent at sorting out the noise. Input that is relatively constant (the report you're reading, your surroundings) can be safely ignored, a process known as habituation. Meanwhile, high contrast stimuli⁸—bright lights, loud noises; essentially, danger—are more likely to break our focus. The apps, emails, and other technology that are supposed to help us be more productive instead provides constant distraction in the form of pings, buzzes, and pop ups (not that we needed more reasons to turn our attention from work). And every time you lose focus, it can take up to 25 minutes⁹ for your mind to settle back into what it was doing. What seems like an innocuous two minutes of procrastination can have greater impact on your work day.

YOUR BRAIN



we're
being
interrupted
faster than
we can
even
refocus

60 MINUTES OF WORK



But don't panic, it's not all bad. Dr. Gloria Mark, the same professor who found that it takes nearly a half an hour to re-focus on a task after being distracted, also found that people often **work faster**¹⁰ if they know they're going to be interrupted. Anticipating distraction can help you to focus and complete a given task on time (just think of all those all-nighters you pulled in college). Conversely, allowing yourself to be distracted by planning it into your day can also prove beneficial. Brief bouts of procrastination, like surfing the web, can help to increase creativity and boost alertness.

A recent study of office workers found that those who were the most productive, took the most breaks. More specifically, these enviably efficient people took a 17-minute break for every 52 minutes of concentrated work. In a typical eight-hour workday, that works out to approximately seven pauses from work to chat with colleagues, grab a coffee, get some fresh air, or catch-up on the news. Knowing you can take these breaks throughout the day is motivation to fully concentrate on one task at a time.



SHAKE



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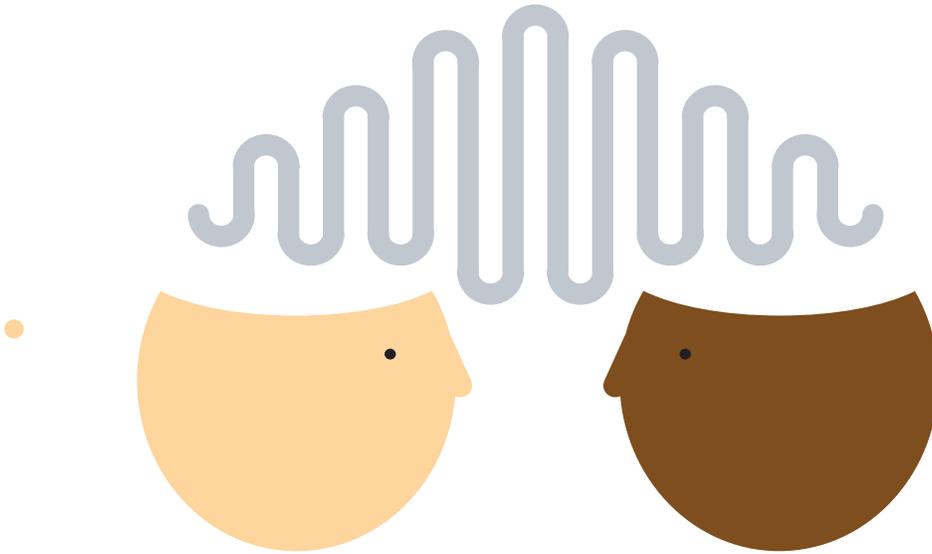
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WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY

We all want to see our to-do list disappear and finish projects with a sense of calm achievement, not a hurried “Ship it!” Here are five simple things you can do to improve your team’s overall productivity and well-being.

Understanding the obstacles to maximizing a team’s productivity was just the first step. Now we can tackle each problem one by one.

WHAT MAKES FOR A PRODUCTIVE SPACE? AN INTERVIEW WITH BREATHER EXPERTS.

Amy Johnson
Interior Design Manager



Charles Colby
User Experience Researcher

Why did you develop archetypes? Isn't a quiet space a quiet space?

CC: Our spaces were being used by a variety of different teams for a variety of different use cases. By creating these archetypes, we could design specific spaces that were optimized to support very specific types of meetings.

How did you research how spaces and design affect productivity?

CC: By combining qualitative methods such as in-context interviews, quantitative methods such as surveys and data analysis, and real-time customer feedback, we maintain a deep understanding of what's working well and where new opportunities lie.

What are the different elements you look at when designing a space?

AJ: Before we even design the space, we first consider the city, the neighborhood, and the building. Our real estate team finds amazing open spaces full of natural light, but because the size, shape, and architectural details vary from space to space, we really have to design each Breather as the unique environment that it is. No matter the architecture of the space, there are few elements we always include:

- Natural light to keep you alert
- Spacious layouts that give you the room to think
- Calming color palettes
- Design details such as books, tchotchkes that help catch the distracted eye
- Comfortable furniture for long sessions.

What's a simple thing people can do to make their personal workspace better?

AJ: Simplify your space. Put things you know inspire you nearby, but don't get overwhelmed by distractions. Having multiple areas to work is ideal: being able to move from a desk to a comfortable chair throughout the day resets a foggy mind.

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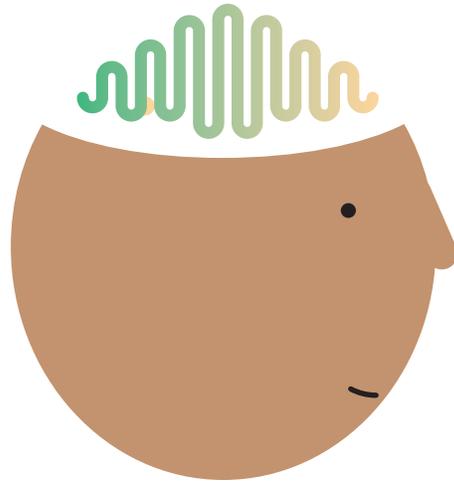
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WORK DIFFERENTLY.

The knowledge economy and the ongoing technological transformation of the workplace have demonstrated that the old ways of measuring productivity just don't cut it. If we're going to perform at our best, we need to reevaluate how we work together.

1 If work is more collaborative than ever...

we should adopt new practices that help the team build trust and transparency.

2 If technology is integral to work...

we need to find better ways to incorporate it into our work, rather than let apps and gadgets become our rulers.

3 If our brains are built to love distraction...

we have to find distraction-free workspaces that seek to manage distraction as opposed to fostering it.

A CHECKLIST TO GET YOU STARTED

- Plan your Monday Planning Meetings and Friday Ship Meetings
- Take a few minutes at the start of meetings to catch up on life and ongoing projects
- No Meeting Wednesdays! Go ahead and block the time in your team's calendars
- Book regular offsites and retreats
- Book a working lunch in a different environment
- Connect with your team. Book weekly 1:1 meetings and monthly retrospectives





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Accountability
Achievement
Align
Alertness
All-hands
Anticipation
App
Assign
Attention
Authenticity
Avoid
Blocker
Boost
Brain
Break
Build
Busyness
Busywork
Chemistry
Clarity
Collaboration
Colleague
Comfort
Competition
Complete
Connection
Contrast
Contribution
Conversation
Co-worker
Creativity
Customers
Danger
Day
Deadline
Deliver
Dependability
Design
Difference
Digital
Distraction
Discussion
Diversion
Dynamics
Economy
Efficiency
Effort
Email
Emotion
Encourage
Energy
Environment
Evaluation
Evolution
Example
Experience
Experiment
Exchange
Factory
Failure
Fear
Feeling
Filter
Focus
Formula
Freedom
Goals
Group
Hack
Help
Hire
Hours
Hurry
Ideas
Ignore
Inbox
Input
Instinct
Impact
Improve
Individuals
Information
Input
Inter-personal

Interruption
Invention
Knowledge
Lazy
Leader
Life
Light
Lists
Manage
Manufacture
Meaning
Measuring
Meeting
Motivation
Multitasking
Newsfeed
Noise
Office
Offsite
Output
Overload
Over-hearing
People
Performance
Personality
Phone
Policy
Positive

Practices
Priorities
Productivity
Process
Procrastination
Progress
Project
Psychology
Purpose
Quality
Rallying
Ratio
Reflection
Rejection
Relationship
Rely
Response
Responsability
Retrospective
Reward
Rhythm
Safety
Sensory
Schedule
Score
Setting
Sharing
Size

Stimuli
Structure
Suggestion
Surroundings
Task
Team
Technology
Thinking
Time
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Workflow
Workplace

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ABOUT
BREATHER



Founded in 2012, by Julien Smith, CEO, and Caterina Rizzi, Breather is an international network of beautiful, professional spaces designed for team meetings, offsites, brainstorming, workshops, training sessions and more, available by the day, week, or month. Practical and distraction-free, locations are exclusively yours for the length of your reservation and can be reserved and accessed through Breather's website and mobile app. At Breather, we do things differently. With no membership or subscription fee, you book and pay for the time you need.

Questions?

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ABOUT
NOBL

NOBL

NOBL (pronounced no-bell) is a collective of organizational designers, experience designers, and team coaches committed to expanding access to meaningful work. Every team that we help will result in a greater impact on the world. Our purpose is to help your team unleash theirs. Our life's work is helping you pursue yours.

Questions?

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