

What Thought Leaders Are Saying about the Perfect Day Method

"Pierre Khawand demonstrates how simple visuals can not only help you navigate a "perfect day" but also help him explain the concepts behind working in short, productive bursts of attention. His visual depiction of the "Results Curve" is, literally, eye opening. I love his argument for using paper journals to anchor your progress."

-- David Sibbet, Bestselling Author, President and Founder, The Grove Consultants International

"The PDM approach helps me create a consistent structure and process for a multi-tasking, multi-lingual and multi-project work environment that often defies time zones. It is an easy method to integrate with my tools as I always carry a notebook for my ideas and thoughts throughout the day."

-- Karina Jensen, Practice Director, Centre for Leadership and Effective Organizations, Professor, Global Innovation and Leadership, NEOMA Business School, France

"In a world saturated with inputs and information, we need something to clear the clutter and focus on what truly matters. Pierre's time-tested tactics will help you do just that, in short powerful bursts that add up to significant accomplishments. Read this book, practice the principles, and watch your work transform 15 minutes at a time."

-- Jenny Blake, author of Pivot: The Only Move That Matters is Your Next One

"Behind every successful strategic plan is an intense focus on execution. The Perfect 15-Minute Day Method enables teams to reach their strategic goals 15 minutes at a time, providing individuals and organizations a competitive advantage in today's information deluge. In addition to step-by-step instructions, the book demonstrates how key elements of the method are supported by neuroscientific research. A must read for today's executives and their teams to avoid scattered minds and execute to achieve their strategic goals."

-- Adrian C. Ott, Award-Winning Author, The 24-Hour Customer, CEO Exponential Edge Inc.

“As a psychiatrist who specializes in treating ADHD, I know the importance of structure and the value of tools that can be used to create this structure. This book provides an excellent tool to structure one’s time. Unlike most books tackling time management issues, this book goes a step farther by addressing not just the mental, but also emotional factors affecting productivity.

“My ADHD patients often experience overwhelm with their to-do lists. This method gives a much needed structure to accomplish these tasks, in a manageable way.”

-- Alicia R. Maher, M.D., Board Certified Psychiatrist, Subspecialty Board Certified, Psychosomatic Medicine, Akasha Center for Integrative Medicine, Santa Monica, CA, UCLA School of Medicine Clinical Faculty

What users Are Saying about the Perfect Day Method

"[I] can finally remember what it is like to love my job again!"

--Rachel Ungar

"I became more mindful of what I was doing throughout the day without being a slave to the clock." -- Julie Meyer

"I became more aware of how I get distracted and learned some ways to limit the distractions and to resist the pull of e-mail." --Ann T.

"Big insights [from the method] were the value of making your to-do list and actions visible and becoming more aware of how much time things take to do." --Susan Templeton

"[The method] helped me prioritize and focus on the things I really wanted to get done." -- Audrey Plough

"[The method] provided me with great clarity on how I'm spending my time during the day and where I trip myself up." -- Amy Koh

"It is simple and direct enough to be useful all the time." -- Rosanne Belpedio

"[One of the top three benefits of the method is] getting things done that I may have been procrastinating on." -- Jeff Fanselow

"[I gained] a sense of calm and control." --Katie Uckele

"Total success" -- Tiffany Conn

the PERFECT 15-MINUTE DAY



Managing your
TIME • THOUGHTS • EMOTIONS

Pierre Khawand

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About Pierre Khawand

Pierre Khawand has more than twenty years of experience in the software industry. He has led several technology ventures, completed successful mergers and acquisitions, and founded People-OnTheGo in 2001. His Accomplishing More Leadership Program helps today's leaders develop the awareness and behaviors needed to focus on results and develop people in the midst of the information overload. His bestselling Accomplishing More With Less workshop is enabling today's business professionals make breakthroughs in their work and personal lives. Pierre holds a Master's degree in Engineering from the University of Michigan, and has completed several Executive Education programs at the Stanford Graduate School of Business (Stanford California). When not tackling productivity issues, Pierre enjoys hikes with his wife and friends in the San Francisco area, as well as Tai Chi and Argentine Tango.

Also by Pierre Khawand

- *Time for Leadership*
- *The Results Curve*
- *The Accomplishing More With Less Workbook*
- *Accomplishing More With Google Apps*
- *The New New Inbox*
- *The Perfect 15-Minute Day Journal*

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank the early adopters of the Perfect 15-Mintue Day Method who contributed tremendously to the refinement of the method and who helped us confirm that there is hope for managing the overload, feeling calmer and happier in the workplace and beyond.

Special thanks to the People-OnTheGo team, especially Sarah Tang for her dedicated effort in research and writing, and her valuable insights throughout this journey, and Katie Uckele for her extensive research that helped support the method every step of the way, and Claire Donaldson for helping make the book visual and user friendly.

Last but not least, thanks to my family and friends, whose support and engagement have been most instrumental to the completion of this yet another exciting journey.

I hope you enjoy reading *The Perfect 15-Minute Day* and take these habits to your work and personal life to create accomplishments and happiness for you, your team, your organization, and your community!

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Chapter 1

Getting started

We live in a world of overload, no doubt about it!



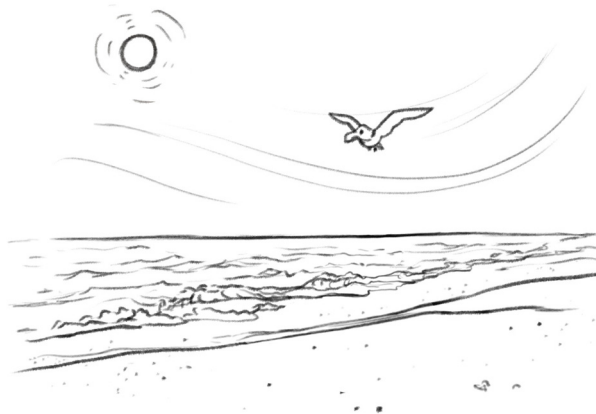
Unless you have been on some other planet for some time, you already know and feel the overload in some way or another: too many e-mails, too

much social media, too many competing and changing priorities, too many interruptions. Worse, we are led to believe that we need to keep up, to speed up in order to succeed in the modern workplace.¹ As a result, our minds are overwhelmed and scattered. Studies show that work in an interruptive environment, whether or not those interruptions are related to our work, increases the experience of stress, frustration, time pressure, and effort to get the work done.²

¹ “Time and Time Again: The Search for Meaning/fulness Through Popular Discourse on the Time and Timing of Work” by Dawna I. Ballard and Sunshine P. Webster

² “The Cost of Interrupted Work: More Speed and Stress” by Gloria Mark, Daniela Gudith, and Ulrich Klocke (2008)

The Perfect 15-Minute Day Method (PDM) comes to the rescue



After the success of the Accomplishing More in Less Time, With Less Effort, and Less Stress methodology ³, with thousands of business professionals achieving significant breakthroughs as a result, we

³ The Accomplishing More With Less Workbook, The Accomplishing More With Less Workshop, The Accomplishing More Leadership Program.

continued to explore new ways to overcome the overload and help business professionals regain their ability to focus so as to feel happier and more fulfilled at work. Thus, PDM was born.

At the end of the day, a happier you!



Participants who tested and helped refine PDM were fascinated by how simple and how powerful it is, that is, simple in its application but powerful in its outcome. They reported feeling significantly less scattered and better able to manage interruptions, stay focused, and quickly recover

from inevitable interruptions; they also felt better at estimating how long tasks would take, and utilizing their time more strategically. Participants also reported that they felt less stressed, that they stopped more often to acknowledge their accomplishments, and felt fulfilled and motivated. They were happy!

All you need is a journal and a timer



With just a journal and a timer, PDM helps you a) *be always aware of what you're working on* and b) *stay focused on the task at hand by working in highly productive bursts of short 15-minute increments*. The method includes the use of tags to help you track your tasks, manage interruptions,

manage thoughts and emotions along the way, and be able to reconcile and close the loops on unfinished items at the end of the day.

Studies confirm that we work in a highly interruptive work environment, and find that most of us use tools like post-its, planners, and e-mail printouts to help us maintain our attention and keep track of information from all our different tasks.⁴ The journal exceeds this function. While post-its, planners, and e-mail printouts remind us of important tasks, they often are not organized by priority - or organized at all. Too often these items are scattered in the workspace and easy to lose track of. The PDM journal is organized to simply and efficiently inform us of tasks and their priority. It also unifies your notes and provides a great audit trail.

⁴ “Constant, Constant, Multi-tasking Crazyiness: Managing Multiple Working Spheres“ (2004) by Victor M. González and Gloria Mark

If you're thinking "but I do everything electronically", you will soon discover the journal perfectly supplements the electronic world and plays an important role in helping us gain depth and perspective.

While many of the PDM techniques can be done digitally to the same success, the PDM journal has a key advantage over digital task management assistants - it is always visible and can be constantly consulted. The journal will not be minimized while you are tasking. Taking notes in the journal is less intrusive, usually much quieter, and much faster than opening a note-taking app. Often we get distracted in the process of accessing a digital note-taking app. The journal is simple enough to quickly capture an item without distracting you. Plus, a journal can be with you at all times. It takes no time to get it out and open it, and it never runs out of battery.

We suggest trying a paper journal first, then, if you feel you can effectively integrate the method digitally, feel free to do so.

Why 15 minutes, you ask?



Anything shorter is not long enough to make meaningful progress on most work-related tasks, and anything longer loses its immediacy and risks our getting lost in time. The 15-minute increment is both short

enough to keep us focused and long enough for us to accomplish something.

Your timer should always be set to 15 minutes, and reset to 15 minutes. Having a defined allotment of time frees you of making a decision every time you take on a task. Making a decision takes time and energy that could be better spent working on your task.

Note that the 15 minutes is not a deadline. It is an intention and a checkpoint. It means: “I intend to focus on this task for up to 15 minutes and then check to see if I am on the right track or if I want to adjust.” It is about becoming aware of time instead of getting lost in time.

The 15-minute mark doesn’t limit you from working more on a task. Once the timer beeps you can renew your intention to work on that task for another 15 minutes, and yet another one, and therefore work on the task for a cumulative 45 minutes, or longer. The idea is that you have checkpoints so you can be more conscious of the time decisions that you are making.

While it may be tempting to choose a time increment other than 15 minutes, we urge you to start with the 15-minute increment and stick to it for a week at first. In fact, studies show that people already work in fragmented amounts of time averaging about 12 minutes of continuous work on a task before switching to another.⁵ Thus 15 minutes of focus is more than enough to ask for in today's busy workday. Most users discover that the 15-minute time increment is just right and continue to use it. Some tailor it to 20 or 30 minutes.

⁵ "Constant, Constant, Multi-tasking Crazyiness: Managing Multiple Working Spheres" (2004) by Victor M. González and Gloria Mark

PDM helps you manage your thoughts
and your emotions



After all, and before all, we are humans! We have thoughts and emotions of all kinds, some more productive than others. How we handle these thoughts and emotions, especially the unproductive ones, can have a

profound impact on our stress level, our mood, our accomplishments, our relationships, and our happiness. Unless we are equipped with the tools we need to become aware of these thoughts and emotions and effectively manage them, we are bound to a less satisfying or even persistently frustrating existence. PDM provides you with the tools and techniques that are needed to manage thoughts and emotions.

PDM turns you into a multi-tasking guru



True multi-tasking--which consists of performing multiple tasks exactly at the same time like computers with multiple processors, is not

possible for us humans. Instead, we switch between the tasks at hand, thinking that we are multi-tasking.

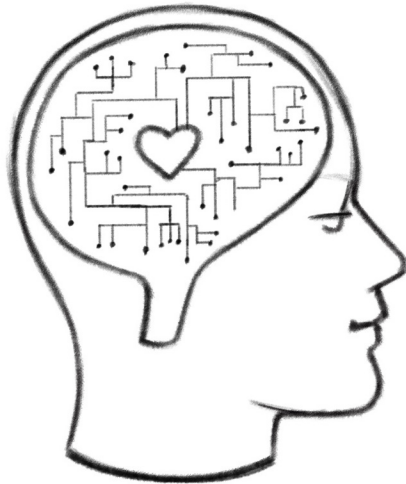
This form of multi-tasking (or task switching) is inefficient and tiring, largely because of the limitations of our short-term memory and inability to keep all the needed information handy as we switch from task to task. The PDM journal solves this issue by allowing us to create the necessary “information stores” to help us switch between, and skillfully handle, the most demanding tasks with ease.

Multi-tasking also contributes to stress and overwork. Studies show that those who multi-task feel like time moves more quickly and that their workload is much heavier than those who focus on a single task.⁶ Ideally we would work on a single task on our own pace, but we know this

⁶ “Simultaneity, Sequentiality, and Speed: Organizational Messages About Multiple-Task Completion” by Keri K. Stephens, Jaehee K. Cho, & Dawna I. Ballard

is not possible in the average workday. Instead, PDM gives us the tools to switch between tasks yet maintain a singular focus.

PDM helps you achieve mindfulness
@work



There is growing scientific evidence that mindfulness and mindfulness practices have concrete physical and mental health benefits. MRI scans of meditators compared to non-meditators have shown that

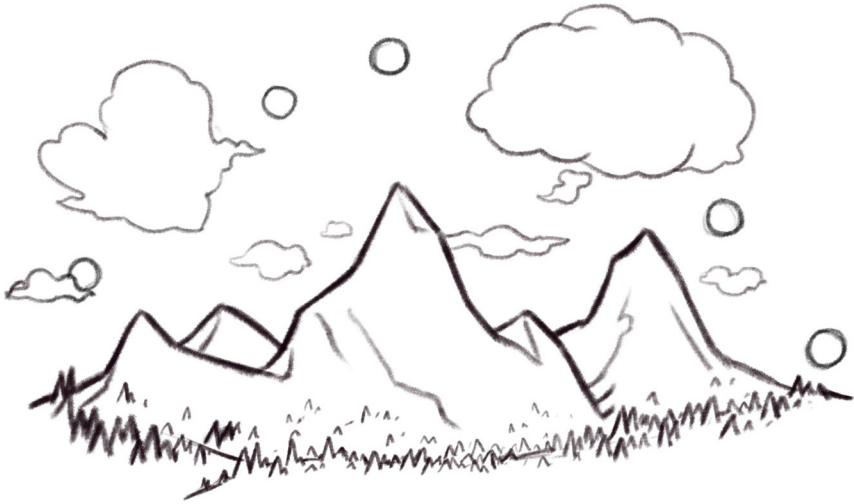
mindfulness practices correlate with a thicker cortex in regions of the brain associated with attention and sensory processing.⁷ Other research shows that mindfulness practices increase activity in areas of the brain associated with positive emotion, and even boosts the immune system.⁸

The Perfect Day Method is designed to give you the skills to hone your attention and regain control of your time. PDM practices bring mindfulness to your work in a transparent and profound way so you can reap these benefits and experience amazing results. You will discover more about this topic in the Mindfulness @Work chapter.

⁷ Lazar, S. W., Kerr, C. E., Wasserman, R. H., Gray, J. R., Greve, D. N., Treadway, M. T., ... Fischl, B. (2005). Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness. *Neuroreport*, 16(17), 1893–1897.

⁸ Richard Davidson, et al., “Alterations in Brain and Immune Function Produced by Mindfulness Meditation,” *Psychosomatic Medicine* 65, no. 4 (2003): 564-570

PDM is not just a timer technique

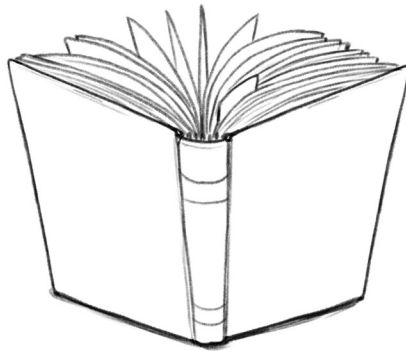


Behind the simplicity of PDM lies enormous depth. Don't mistake PDM for a timer technique. While PDM incorporates the timer, similar to some of the popular methods like the Pomodoro Technique and others, PDM is a complete method for managing your time, your thoughts and

emotions, your interruptions, and, equally important, for bringing mindfulness and play to your daily work, helping you accomplish amazing things and be happier doing so.

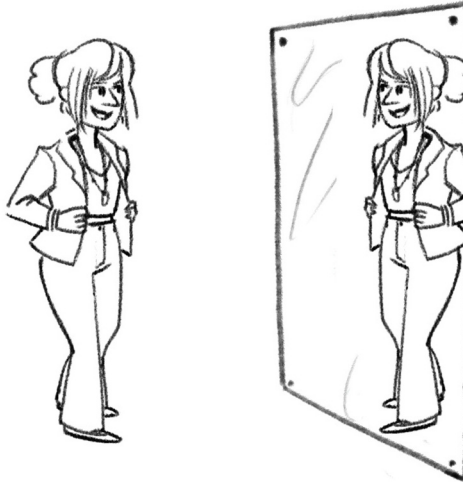
PDM, mostly by design and partly by discovery, leverages science and neuroscience, primary and secondary research, including the feedback from users who have reported major improvements in their work and personal lives as a result.

In the upcoming chapters



The Results Curve™ chapter provides some of the fundamentals related to how we work and how we achieve results, or not, depending on interruptions and distractions. The chapters that follow explain the method and the insights behind the method. Each chapter begins with a “How it Works” section that explains certain tags or features, and then a “Deeper Meaning” section that explains some of the underlying insights and observations, and finally a “Discoveries” section that portrays some of the observations from users of the method.

Remember: Your life is a reflection of the next 15 minutes



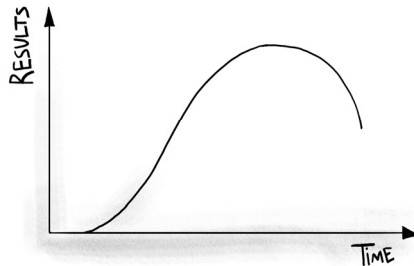
If you don't know how to manage the next 15 minutes, you don't know how to manage your life. So let us get started!

Chapter 2

The Results Curve™

The Accomplishment Zone™

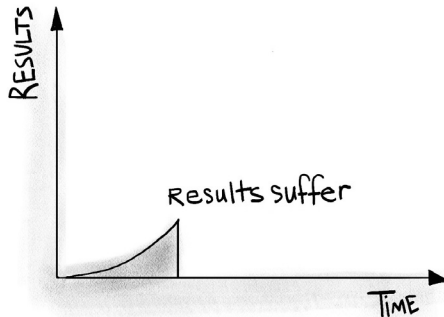
Let us start by examining how our results change with time when we are working on a task. When we start to work on a task, we start to produce results, and then as we continue to work on that task, we produce more results. This continues until eventually the flow of results begins to level off and then starts to diminish. Results diminish because we get tired, or because we have done what we could and now need to wait for someone else to do their part, or because we have completed the task:



Now let's get back to *real* life. What happens in the real world after we spend a few minutes on a task?

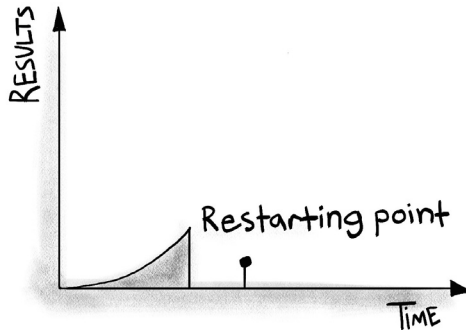
We get interrupted!

E-mail arrives in our inbox and we feel this irresistible urge to check it out, or an instant message (IM) pops up with a compelling proposition. Then there's the phone ringing or a chatty colleague or eager boss stopping by. When an interruption takes place, it prematurely ends the progress on the task at hand:



Post-interruption, when we resume our work on this task, our mind needs to re-retrieve the relevant pieces of information that were let go of during the interruption, and reconstruct the logic and relationships that

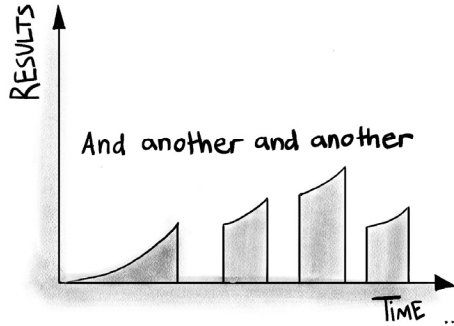
were previously established. Worse, most people resume a task after dealing with more than two other unrelated tasks; thus re-starting requires more cognitive effort to reorient, and often results in redundant work.⁹ This means we will suffer a setback at the restarting point:



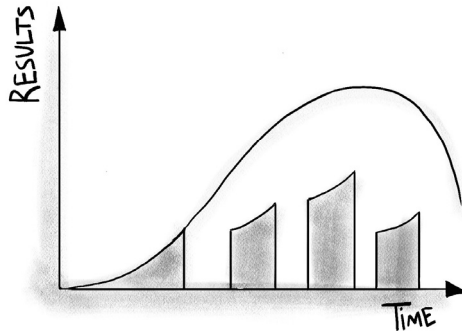
Then we start making progress again, but a few minutes later, another interruption pulls us off task, and our results suffer again. This pattern repeats itself time after time as the calls, emails, and IM's continue.

⁹ Gloria Mark, Victor M. Gonzalez, and Justin Harris "No Task Left Behind? Examining the Nature of Fragmented Work" (2005)

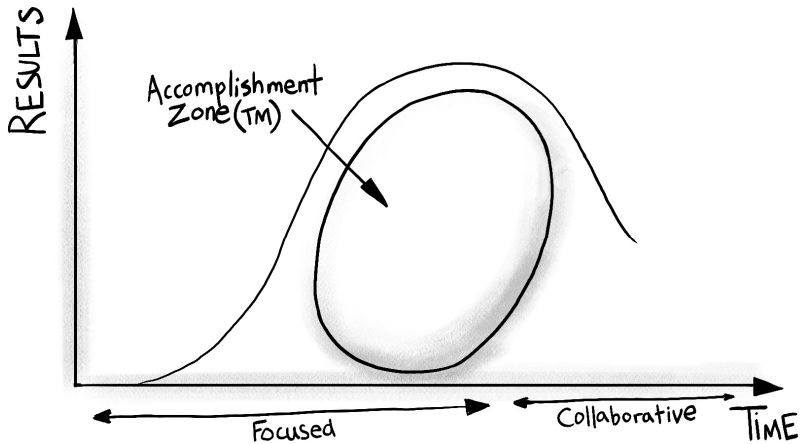
Interruptions are no longer the exceptions in the digital age – they are the norm. This is our life: a life of interruptions:



If we compare the actual results that we are getting, represented by the shaded areas below, to the potential results that we could realize if we could manage to stay focused on our task, represented by the Results Curve™, the outcome is nothing less than shocking. We are probably getting a small fraction of the potential results that we would be getting if we were to stay focused:

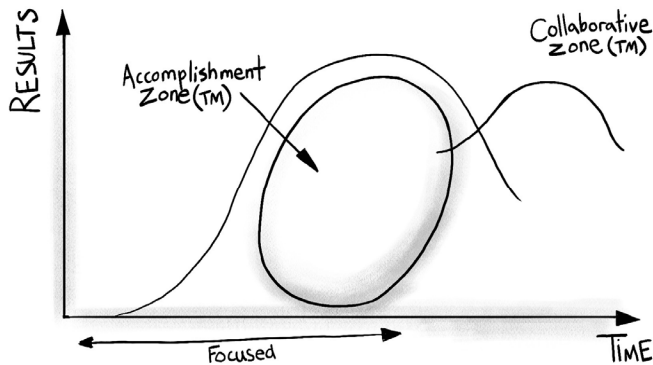


To remedy the situation, you need to stay focused on your task long enough to achieve the desired results. This can take fifteen minutes, thirty minutes, or longer, depending on the task:



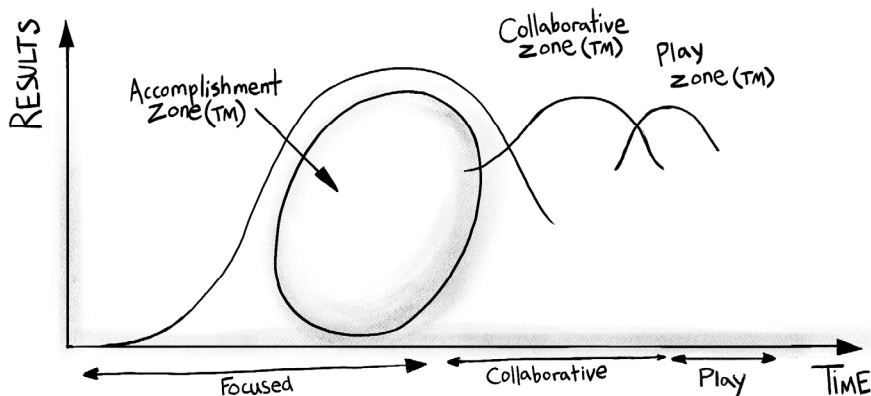
The Collaborative Zone™

Once you finish the focused session and have accomplished meaningful results, now is the time to stop focusing and switch to being collaborative. This means live interactions with our stakeholders as well as handing e-mail and the like. Just like the focused session, This collaborative session is of paramount importance and likely to bring significant results:



The Play Zone™

Once you finish the collaborative session, it is time to stop and take a break. This break is intended to help you get refreshed and energized and ready for whatever happens next. We call this break the Play Zone™. It can be short and sweet such as a breathing exercise, stretching for a few minutes, listening to your favorite music, or it can be more involved such as taking a walk around the block:



Three important takeaways from the Results Curve™

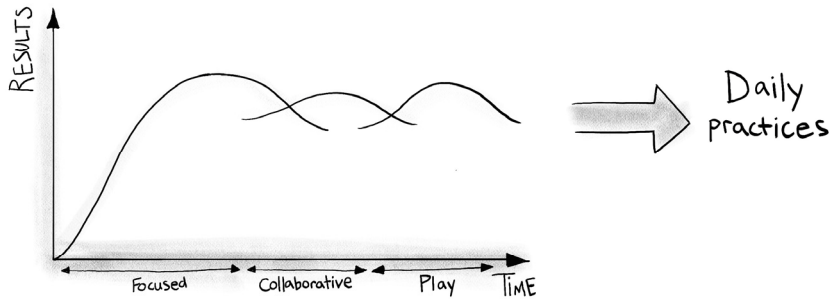
- Focus is crucial
- Stopping is essential
- Working in bursts is the name of the game

Focus is critical. As illustrated in the Results Curve™ above, without the focused session, we are *doomed*. We work a few minutes here and a few minutes there, stay at the superficial level, do the quick fixes, and not get deep into our work. We miss the creative and strategic thinking that brings about meaningful accomplishments. As we navigate quickly from one interruption to the next, our brain gets scattered, we get agitated, and soon stressed and overwhelmed.

Stopping is essential. There are three important stops that the Results Curve™ highlights. First is stopping and focusing. Second is stopping the focused effort to collaborate. After all, without collaboration, we can be left in the dark, missing important information, ideas, and contributions from our stakeholders. Third is stopping and getting energized, without which, we can be getting unproductive, ineffective, stressed, and slowly but surely heading to burnout.

Working in bursts is key. This means alternating between focus, collaboration, and play bursts. The length and order of these bursts is all up to you. These depend on the nature of your work and your preferences. Working in bursts is more than just alternating however. It is becoming aware of which phase you are in at any particular time, and purposefully choosing to switch at the right time.

The Results Curve™ and The Perfect Day Method



The Perfect Day Method enables you to turn the insights from the Results Curve™ into practical and sustainable behaviors and habits and therefore taking your accomplishments and your happiness to a whole new level. Let's get going!