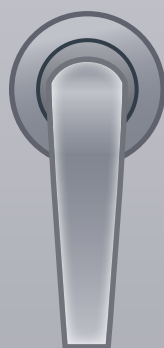


ENTER THE VAULT



FROM FOCUSWISE

*a mini-book, for those living in the
age of distraction*

**For most of us, the
thought of being in a
vault is *scary*.**

No, not this kind of vault ...



...but a place that simply insulates us from the noise of modern life.

It's a place without windows to the world, without someone else to see you or for you to see—where you're safe from interferences that stifle your productivity and creativity.

THE VAULT
IS A PLACE WHERE
YOUR EYES
NEED TIME
TO ADJUST

because a different kind of light shines where distractions
have been removed.

Those who develop the capacity to stay inside long enough
for their digital withdrawals to subside will be deeply
rewarded.



Since most organizations today are passively going the way of distraction, the few who:

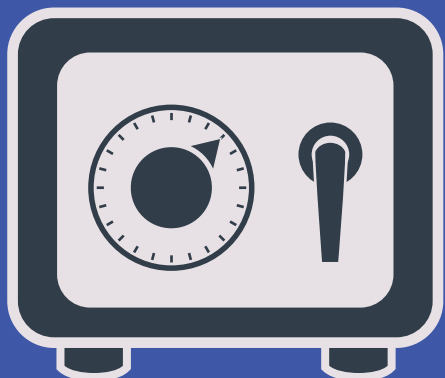
recognize the gravity of the situation,
learn how to **quiet** the world,
enter the **vault**,
and **take control** of their attention

will see their value in the marketplace multiplied, exponentially.

* Did you notice this treasure on the previous page,
hidden in the darkness?



This practical guide will help you answer three main questions so that you'll be able to set up your vault and function within it:



WHERE?



WHEN?



WHAT?

How can you set up a vault and become a vault specialist in a hectic office environment?

How can you be a vault specialist and still be available when the need arises?

How do you know what to do once you're in the vault?

BUT
FIRST

LET'S TALK ABOUT

WHY

We are wired for distraction because our sensory system is always craving stimulation.

This makes perfect sense for survival. If you are in the jungle, the sooner you sense a hungry leopard, the better your chances of not becoming its lunch.

However, unless you're a safari guide, you no longer typically come into contact with various species that can end your life.

While the world around us has drastically changed, our brains have not been very quick to adapt. Thus, we are easily distracted by external stimuli that serve no protective purpose.

We must find ways to dull our search for environmental distractions so that we can harness our productivity.

The best way to limit these distractions **is to ensure that our environment does not contain them.**

**This is why you need a vault.
This is why we made this guide.**

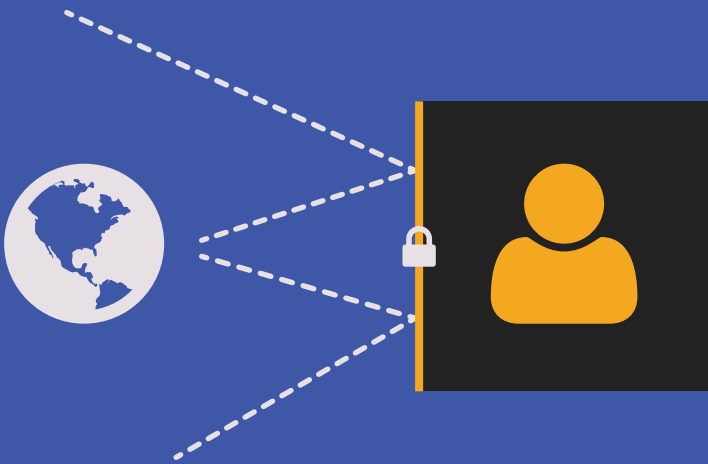


PART I — WHERE In Search of the Vault



{ 1 }

YOU MUST BE
UNREACHABLE
TO THE WORLD



AND THE WORLD MUST BE
UNREACHABLE
TO YOU

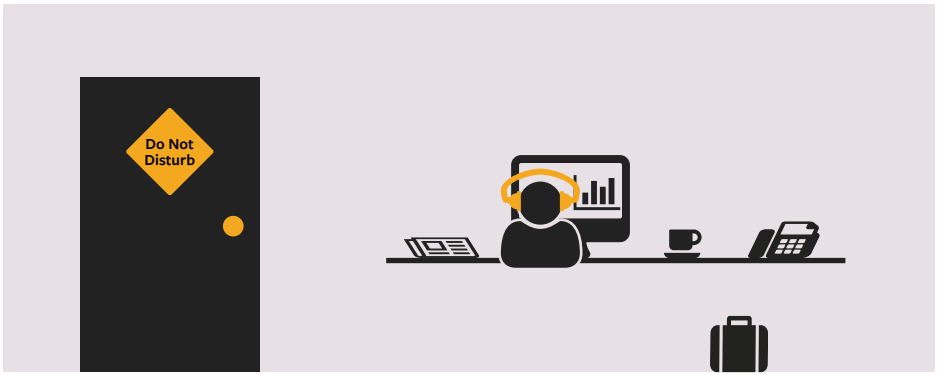
You're familiar with Murphy's Law, right? It states that if anything can go wrong, it *will*. This applies especially to your attention.

If anyone can interrupt you, they will. We call this “Murphy's Law of Interruption.”

Thing is, you tend to break your own concentration just as much as others do. You're wired for distraction: always looking for new stimuli. Dr. Gloria Mark of UC Irvine authored a well-known study that explored this subject. In the study she found that we average only three minutes of work before being deterred by an interruption — **sixty percent of which are caused by us**, deliberately interrupting ourselves. The same study found that once we have been diverted from a task, it takes us an average of twenty-three minutes to get back to work.

A good vault is necessary to make you unreachable to the world *and* the world unreachable to you.

Now, let's get specific.



CREATE **PHYSICAL** BARRIERS

Again, if someone can interrupt you, they will; and the easier it is to reach you, the less likely it is that the interruption will be important. Research shows that the less visible a thing is, the less likely it is that you'll take the time to find it.

Think of your remote control. You'll sit for 30 minutes watching cartoons simply because you can't see your remote. The thought of having to get up, lift the couch cushion, and find your remote is daunting.

Let's face it: we're lazy. The less visible you can make yourself, the more likely it is that you won't be distracted by other people.

Here are some tips for making yourself physically unreachable:

KEEP YOUR DOOR CLOSED

A good vault is a place where you can physically separate yourself from your peers. It should have barriers that can keep you from your coworkers, friends, family, and maybe even the occasional enemy.

HANG UP A “DO NOT DISTURB” SIGN

We designed this sign for a reason. Hang it on your door or the back of your chair, and see the unnecessary interruptions come to a screeching halt.

GET NOISE-CANCELING HEADPHONES

Some of us don't have the luxury of a personal office. Maybe you share an office, maybe you work in a cubicle, or maybe your office walls are just paper-thin. Noise-cancelling headphones are a great alternative for less than ideal circumstances.

BONUS: LISTEN TO THE *RIGHT* MUSIC

Research shows that in certain instances music can increase both our creativity and productivity. The right kind of music in the right situation can drown out unwanted noise, increase your focus, reign in your wandering thoughts, and even improve your mood by increasing your dopamine levels. Classical and instrumental music have both been shown to have these effects on the listener. However, if you select the wrong kind of music, all these benefits will be turned on their heads, and your productivity will noticeably suffer. Listening to lyrically-driven music at work tends to hinder your ability to absorb new information. It's also un-focus-wise to listen to anything that's new to you, as your interest will be piqued and your creativity undermined. So: approach with caution.

CREATE **VIRTUAL** BARRIERS

Physically isolating yourself is only the first step in creating your vault. You may be away from your *peers*, but your phone and laptop keep you connected to almost *everyone else in the world*.

You've put up walls of defense around your attention, but your phone is a Trojan Horse. It entices you until you invite it inside, but at any moment it will drop a troop of attention-hungry soldiers who will thwart your plans.

Keep the Trojan Horse out.

LOCK UP YOUR PHONE

There is no cell reception in real vaults and there shouldn't be any in your vault either. You need to isolate yourself from the tempting distractions that your phone provides. Put it in a drawer, use a "face-down until it's done" case, whatever reminds you: while you're in the vault, you're off your phone.

Some will object: "What if my client, husband, mom, etc. NEEDS ME?" But how often does a true emergency actually happen? Not often, but just in case, you can set up other means of communication: such as giving your mom your coworker's number.

There are always exceptions to the rule, but keep focused on the goal: to retrain both your brain, and your colleagues' expectations.

ENTER "AIRPLANE MODE"

Airplane Mode and the "Do Not Disturb" mode on your phone both serve as great alternatives if the box isn't an option. The "Do Not Disturb" setting is especially ideal if you are expecting an important phone call, since you can select which calls can still come through.

EITHER CLOSE YOUR LAPTOP, OR PUT IT IN "FULL SCREEN"

If possible, you should keep your laptop out of the vault. But we do live in the digital age, so this is often not an option. We suggest limiting yourself to the 'screen' in which you are working—viewing it in full screen mode will keep your wandering eyes from the legion of distractions scattered across your desktop.

BONUS: INSTALL FREEDOM

There are a host of apps and programs designed to keep you off social media and on task. The best all-around app we've found to keep you (and your team!) on target is here: www.freedom.to

{ 2 }

PICK A
SINGLE,
STATIONARY
LOCATION



Not long ago, a person's immediate environment dictated their task. If you were in the field, you were working, and if you were in the house, you were contributing to the chores or playing with the kids.

The human brain actually works best this way. You develop your habits in environmentally-specific settings, so you need to apply this knowledge to the formation of your vault.

It's time to start harnessing the power of your environment to help you achieve a higher level of productivity.

You can do that by dedicating a single space solely to the purpose of work.

In an ideal world, you'd have two desks — one for Vault work, and one for everything else. But for those of us that are limited in desk space, a good Ritual can substitute for a separate Location.

**The bottom line —
Environmental habits can help, or they can hurt.
Here are some tips to make sure they help:**

KEEP YOUR VAULT IN THE SAME PLACE

By committing to one workspace you will form habits that will boost your productivity and make you an asset in an attention-deprived market.

YOUR VAULT IS FOR WORK ONLY

A good vault is quite literally a physical space that you have devoted to work and to work alone. Your vault isn't for checking email or monitoring stocks; your vault is where you *get things done*. It is the one place whose sole function is to facilitate productivity.

LEAVE YOUR VAULT WHEN YOUR SESSION IS FINISHED

When your vault session is done, leave the vault. This means getting up and walking *somewhere else* to check your Facebook. You want your vault to be the place that you associate with productivity. If you're playing in the vault, you're confusing your brain.

IF YOU CAN'T LEAVE YOUR VAULT, TRANSFORM IT

If you can't physically leave your office or cube, then try a transformation ritual: undo all of the things you did to make it a vault. Open your door, take off the "Do Not Disturb" sign and liberate your phone from its prison. Your office is a deep-work-space that can be transformed into a normal-work-space.

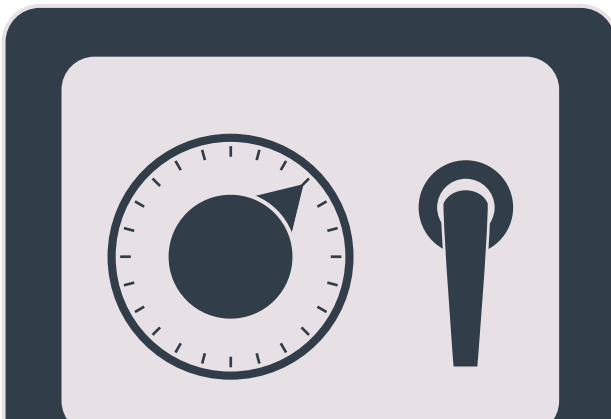


FOR THE TRAVELERS AMONG US...

For some of us, having a single, dedicated workspace is not possible, but here's the good news: all hotels look pretty much the same. Hotel lobbies can now be your vault wherever you go. It is the one place where all you do is work—nothing else. Plane rides are a great place for work as well. For a while, I always found myself playing the game Candy Crush to pass the time on planes. I associated Candy Crush with flying, and only thought of it when I set foot on a plane—my immediate environment was dictating his task. One day it occurred to me: my plane seat can be a sort of vault. Now, when I'm on a plane, I only work on speeches—nothing else. The plane is now a place my brain associates with writing and editing speeches.

SUMMARY

Your vault needs to be a place that is physically and virtually isolated from the world and that it needs to be in the same environment every day.



14.30
15
15.30
16
16.30
17
17.30
18
18.30
19
19.30
20
20.30
21



PART II — WHEN Scheduling Vault Time

August						
We	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
31	1	2	3	4	5	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24
	25	26	27	28	29	30

September						
We	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
	35	36	37	38	39	
	4	5	6	7	8	9
	10	11	12	13	14	15
	16	17	18	19	20	21
	22	23	24	25	26	27
	28	29	30			

PRIORITY IS JOB ONE

I often get the same reaction from people whom I explain the vault concept to. They usually say, “But I have NO TIME! I have clients that expect me, deadlines, meetings—there’s just no time.” My response is simple; if you don’t make the time, you’ll never have the time. By going in the vault, you’ll become more efficient and realize that you have more time than you think.

Also, that’s why I recommend that you do your

VAULT SESSIONS IN THE MORNING

A stylized sunburst graphic in the bottom right corner, consisting of numerous thin, radiating lines in shades of orange and yellow, emanating from a semi-circular orange shape representing the sun.

You wouldn't go rock climbing if you were weak and tired. Your vault sessions should be no different. Do your best to get your vault sessions in when you're most fresh, alert and focused. Do them in the morning, when possible.

Attention is a limited resource that wanes throughout the day; which is why the morning routine is so critical to your success. How many of us waste the first hours of our day, the time when we have the most energy and focus, on things like emails, Starbucks, and meetings? By the time we decide to work, our creative energy and attention has been depleted. Enter your vault in the morning and you will find yourself far less antsy and far more productive.

The frontal lobe runs on glucose, which is essential for productivity and dissipates throughout the day. The more of it we have, the easier it is to focus. Understanding the role of glucose in your ability to focus can have dramatic consequences on your work.



ALSO:

YOUR VAULT SESSIONS SHOULD BE A
REASONABLE
{ **BUT LIMITED** }
AMOUNT OF TIME

Don't live in your vault. The vault is good, the vault is productive, but the vault isn't everything. You need to decide on a reasonable amount of time to set for your vault sessions. That is, an amount of time that is long enough to make real, valuable work possible, but also short enough to keep you sane.

FOCUS 45, FREE 15

This is a big enough chunk of time to get work done, and a long enough break to go alleviate your nagging FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out), ask and answer questions that may have come up during your vault time, and maybe even check your Instagram.

MAKE YOUR VAULT SESSION A GAME

Setting a specific time frame for your vault sessions turns them into a kind of game or challenge. *How much attention concentrate can I squeeze out of the fruit of my brain in the next 45 minutes?* And like every good game, the winner earns a reward: the feeling of accomplishment.

AIM FOR 2 VAULTS PER DAY

It might make sense to have eight vault sessions every day, if you're a machine. Vault sessions will only help your productivity, but you shouldn't stress over them. Realistically speaking, two vault sessions in a day will pay dividends. Commit to two, but keep adding and let us know how many you're able to get in.

BE CALENDAR-CENTRIC

This one is simple: now that you've decided what needs to be done first, it's time to put it in your calendar. When you've mapped out your day, follow the 'path' you've made, and follow it explicitly. Your calendar, rather than your inbox or task list, should now be the primary 'screen' on your computer. Use something like Google Calendar and literally watch as the red line slides down your screen, reminding you that you're running out of time on your tasks. This causes the brain to release the right concoction of neurotransmitters to keep you working—as though you're up against a tight deadline.

TAKE A HIKE

No seriously, go take a hike. Attention Restoration Theory (ART) suggests that people focus better after spending time in nature. ART even suggests that simply looking at scenes of nature will improve your concentration. Whether it's walking around the building on your lunch break, or walking to the park across the street, we suggest you take 10-15 minutes out of your day to get outside and experience nature.

BONUS TIPS



PART III — WHAT In The Vault



THE FIRST THING YOU SHOULD DO IN A VAULT IS PRIORITIZE

- ~~Finish proposal~~
- ~~Groceries~~
- ~~Plan a hike~~
- ~~Respond to email about todos for the day~~



- **Prioritize the todo list**
- ~~Pack lunch for tomorrow~~
- ~~Copy todos into todo journal~~

So you've created your vault; it's unreachable, stationary, exists early in the morning and for a reasonable amount of time. This is all fine and well; but a vault won't work if you don't actually know how to use it.

You've heard it said that a failure to plan is a plan to fail.

So, start your first vault session of the day by prioritizing everything you need to do for the day; create a plan of action and then follow that plan precisely.

BEGIN WITH A TASK DUMP

Every approach to prioritization has to begin with a task dump: a list of every possible thing that you need to get done. Although making one is a good start, it is not enough.

DON'T JUST RANDOMLY CROSS THINGS OFF

It feels good to cross a task off your list, no matter how much effort it took to complete that task. Careful, though. **Task lists give equal credit to decorating your cubicle and to finishing your 10-page business proposal.** If you don't first prioritize your list, you'll spend the day crossing off the easy items and feeling like you've accomplished a lot. You may have crossed seven out of the ten items on your list, but the three you've got left will most likely be the hardest ones to do. This practice will make you end up with a bottom-heavy list. Prioritization must become a priority.

CATEGORIZE YOUR TASK LIST

When you're out blazing a trail in the forest, you need to uproot the stumps before you worry about the twigs. That's how you want to approach your time in the vault—tackle the tough problems first. We suggest categorizing your tasks into five groups:



1) This week's goals



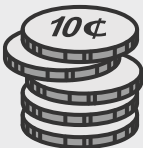
2) Today's priority tasks



3) Combinable tasks



4) To ignore (for now)



5) Non-vital but fun

Dynamite These are ongoing goals (not tasks) that cannot be done in one day. They are major priorities, anywhere from one-week to three-month projects. It's important to write these down — for the sake of your business and your attention. It's best to limit these to about 2 to 4 dynamite goals, max.

Diamonds These are mentally arduous tasks — you should complete these tasks first. You likely don't *want* to do these, but they need to get done. Limit these to about three per day. Minimizing distractions and obstacles is always important, but *especially* so when you're working on these.

Dollars These tasks are mentally easy; they do not take up a significant amount of time or energy. These tasks may need to be done, but they don't need to be done *right now*. These are things like alphabetizing files or doing the laundry. Save these for later in the day, and **stack them up for more value**.

Dirt It's everywhere all the time — just like there are always more tasks you *could* do today. Rather than doing it immediately or (worse) trying to save it all in your head, write these things down so you can **intentionally forget about them** until tomorrow. Plus, today's dirt might be tomorrow's dollars or diamonds.

Dimes From a pure machine logic standpoint, these aren't even "tasks". They're diversions. Why are they on this list? Because we aren't robots, and sometimes our brains need a diversion. This is a list of cat videos on Youtube, great TED talks, sports articles — all the things that serve as a pick-me-up during a tough day.

NOW, DO THE
**HARD
TASKS
FIRST**

Remember: diamonds are the the most valuable treasures in your vault — but just like the gems, they're also the hardest.

As much as you can, tackle these hard things first. A wise man once said, **“The best way to finish something you don’t want to do is to start doing it.”** So when you get into your office, head straight for the cave. Close your door, put up your “Do Not Disturb” sign, and lock up your phone. Say your prayers, make your list, and separate the gems from the rocks. Whatever is hard, whatever is taxing, whatever is daunting— put these at the top of the calendar on your primary ‘screen.’ Now take a deep breath, gather your thoughts, and *attack*.

BONUS TIP: BUILD YOUR FOCUS CAPACITY

Eighty-eight percent of people actively entertain a second screen while watching TV. Take a moment to let that sink in—many of us can't even stay focused on the device that, even on its own, used to be considered the root cause of our cultural ADD. Our capacity to intentionally focus on one thing is diminishing; but a great way to increase your attention span is by adopting the practice of prayer and meditation.

In your first vault session you should begin with five to ten minutes of prayer or meditation. Prayer and meditation, regardless of your religious persuasion, will enrich your vault sessions for two reasons:

Perspective: Intentionally spending time to reflect on the important things in life will help you keep work in its proper place. Prayer and meditation will keep you from flipping out when work sucks—because it inevitably will. They will also help you remember *why* you are working. Part of your time of reflection should be used to ground you and remind you of the *why* of life. This reflection will ensure that you'll be able to keep the stresses of work in perspective.

Cognitive Control: Prayer and meditation are exercises in deliberate attention. You effectively become the captain of your wandering mind, forcing it to focus on what you choose. Like a muscle, the more you exercise cognitive control, the stronger you become. Just ten minutes of prayer per day has been shown to dramatically increase one's ability to sustain focus.



PART IV — NOW
Tools for the Vault



MAKE YOUR

VAULT

MORE VALUABLE



1. CELL PHONE LOCKBOX

The Lockbox helps keep the Trojan Horse out of your vault. Put your cell phone in it for a designated amount of time to keep the distractions at bay.

2. DO NOT DISTURB SIGN

This sign says more than “Do Not Disturb.” It says, “If you have to interrupt me, it better be worth it.”

3. TECH FILTERING APPS

Here’s the list of apps and programs we recommend for your vault:

Freedom freedom.to

Asana asana.com

WriteRoom hogbaysoftware.com

4. NOISE-CANCELING HEADPHONES

Drown out the noise and put up another barrier between you and distractions by using noise-cancelling headphones.

5. CLASSICAL MUSIC

Classical or instrumental music has been shown to increase both creativity and productivity, but lyrical music can have the opposite effect. So: approach with caution.



PART V — OTHERS

Help Your Team Find A Vault

HELP YOUR TEAM BECOME

VAULT SPECIALISTS

LET'S CHAT!

We'd love to hear how vault life is impacting your office environment. Let us know below.

Visit our website: www.focuswise.com
or reach out directly: knice@focuswise.com

CREATE COMPANY VAULT TIME

It is policy at our company that from 9-9:45 and 10-10:45, we have company-wide vault time. If your employees aren't convinced after you have told them about vault-life, *show them* the benefits by enforcing it. It won't take long before they see the positive effects of vault culture.

DISCUSS COMMUNICATION EXPECTATIONS

You should discuss appropriate communication expectations with your family, friends, and colleagues. I knew an owner of a company who would send emails to his employees late at night. This caused his employees to feel like they had to be available around the clock. It's important to have conversations with the people around you to make sure that everyone has a shared understanding of what is expected of them.

LET US HELP!

Still having trouble convincing your colleagues? Following are some ways that we would love to help:

SHARE THIS

<http://bit.ly/vaultfocus>

Curt Steinhorst

Communication Strategy
in a Distracted Age



MORE WAYS WE CAN HELP



WORKSHOPS

Our leadership will work with your team or group to confront the challenges they face as leaders of a tech-driven workforce. They offer participants research-based values, habits, and strategies that will help them reclaim their employees' productive and creative potential. Key issues include:

- Attention and the modern professional
- Obstacles to productivity in tech-centered work environments
- Approaches to workplace communications, old and new
- Meeting dynamics and communication strategies

We show participants how to create environments that bolster their employees' capacity for focus, rather than undermine it.

Learn to answer the big questions: how can your company balance connectivity with vault time? How can your organization embrace emerging technology, while avoiding the negative impact on attention? How can you improve your managers' communication to help them win the attention of their teams?

KEYNOTES



In each intensely practical speech, Curt Steinhorst shares communication insights that help you rise above the noise and focus strategies that help you block it out.

- How do you create environments that actually bolster your capacity for focus rather than undermine it?
- How do you balance between staying informed on trends though connectivity and seeking to create the trends through focused ingenuity?
- How do you engage with emerging technology without letting it exploit you?
- What communication strategies will help you reach a customer in constant distraction?

The speeches provide customized solutions for the distinct challenges facing each unique audience. Here are the most-requested variations of this pertinent topic.

Can I Have Your Attention? Focus Your Team and Get Stuff Done in the Distracted Workplace

Can I Have Your Attention? Reach the Distracted Customer

