

How to Fake Your Focus

Hello, my seller friends. Welcome to School of Sellers. I am Erin Waters and I am your host. And today we are going to talk about a topic that I feel like I have seen pop up a lot lately in Facebook groups and online and the TPT community. And that is ways to regain your focus when you feel like you've lost it altogether. So, today we're going to examine three ways that you can kind of get your groove back when you feel like you're in that funk and you just can't seem to focus on any of your work. I think having a TPT business and being self-employed is such an amazing, wonderful thing that gives us so many freedoms and creative avenues. But there is a downside to it because when we don't feel like working, there is no boss sitting there that's going to set deadlines for us or make us do these projects that are on our lists.

So, when you lose your focus for whatever reason, it can be really hard to get it back and sometimes if you're anything like me, it sends you into this funk where you're just like ugh, I don't know what to do and we often find ourselves in these traps. Either a) you have too many things you want to work on so you don't know where to start or we bounce around between project to project without actually finishing something. That's one way we can lose your focus is having too many things to do. The other way that we lose our focus is just not feeling it. Maybe there are outside influences, too much stuff going on elsewhere and we are tired, we have family stuff going on, we have personal stuff going on and we're just exhausted and we know we need to work because this is our livelihood but we just can't seem to find the energy or the focus to do that.

Good news for you is I've been there, don't that multiple times and I have a couple of quick, easy solutions that you can put into place today if you are feeling one of those ways. Now let's talk about the part where we are losing our focus because we're just not feeling like doing anything. At the beginning of 2020 when our world went to hell and a handbasket, I felt very down, I couldn't bring myself to go on social media because I didn't want to see more and more depressing news and I got into a major funk. There was just too much other stuff going on that I had to worry about. I was tired, I was anxious, I was so scared and I didn't feel like working on work at all. But if you've been listening to the show for a while now, you know that my TPT business is my family's main source of income. So, stopping was simply not an option.

This is where I think having a backup plan of tasks that you can do when you are feeling the lowest motivation possible as a backup plan. So, I like having a mindless list of things that I can do with my business that are still going to make an impact on my business but aren't necessarily going to take a ton of creative energy. And I've done a show about this. I did one a few months back and I referred to these tasks as Netflix and chill tasks. Now I know what Netflix and chill usually means but my version of Netflix and chill is to TPT and chill. I like having tasks that I can do at the end of a long day that don't take much energy, don't take much attention or focus and I can kind of zone out watching my favorite show or movie with my husband while also still getting some things done. Now I'm not saying I do that every night because some nights I need to just straight up relax and do no work at all. But what I found during my moments of low focus was that my Netflix and chill list of tasks can also come in handy during those work days when you know you have to get work done but you simply can't seem to focus on anything big or creative.

I have an Airtable spreadsheet that I use to categorize my tasks based on how much energy it's going to take. So, for example, I know that I perform best in the morning when it comes to things that require creative energy like writing a blog post or writing copy for Facebook. I have to do those things first thing in the morning while I drink my coffee because that's when I'm feeling the most inspired and the most creative. On the flip side, I have those Netflix and chill tasks that take almost no creative energy and are simply either data entry or design things that I don't need to pay close attention to. So, I have used this Airtable spreadsheet to map out all of the tasks that I need to do for my TPT business and I have ranked them using Airtable's amazing, wonderful filters based on the type of energy that they will require of me.

So, there were a lot of days at the beginning of the year when I was feeling unfocused and unmotivated where I would simply spend days on end doing these Netflix and chill tasks. I knew that they weren't the most important things I had to do for my business but it allowed me to still work and still feel productive and not sink deeper into that hole because I was still able to do things that I knew were going to make an impact on my business. And looking back, I was so glad I did that because I didn't completely waste time not working. I was able to still do things for myself. For example, I would download audio books on Audible and listen to those as I did my mindless tasks and I didn't feel worse about myself in the long run because I knew that I was still doing something. If you want to grab that Airtable spreadsheet, you can go to ErinMWaters.com/focus and get the template so that you can also sort your tasks this way.

Now another thing that we should talk about is the amount of time that you spend working on something. And 2020 was taught me a really valuable lesson when it comes to the amount of time that I spend on my work. Now on any given day on average, I love to work. It's what I enjoy doing. It's even a form of self-care for me. I would work sometimes, if I didn't have kids and a husband, I think I would work 24 hours a day and just not even sleep. That's how much I love what I do. Obviously, that's not possible but I am also the type of the person who thrives on batching, right? I love batching my work. I love sitting and getting a ton done in one session versus stretching it out. You guys have heard me talk about batching. But your mind has to be right in order to batch, right? So, here's what happened to me in the beginning of 2020. I learned that you can do anything for 30 minutes. If you are not feeling like getting a ton of work done, I encourage you to set your timer and hold yourself to only 30 minutes of work at a time. And this all stemmed from the fact that when COVID hit and the gyms closed, I had been doing such a good job going to Orange Theory on a regular basis and here's a little secret, guys. I'm a very naturally lazy person. Like I don't like doing stuff. So, Orange Theory was working out perfectly for me because I needed somebody to tell me what to do. I needed to be held accountable because I'm not the type of the person that's just going to wake up and work out on my own. That's just not who I am. So, when the gyms closed, I was like oh, gosh, I need to do something so that I don't totally turn into a circle. So, we ended up getting an exercise bike and I hated the idea at first but then I was like you know what? I committed to doing 30 minutes a day and I told myself Erin, you can do anything for 30 minutes. It's 30 minutes out of your entire day. And so, that helped me realize that yes, I can work out on my own but I could only do it for 30 minutes at a time because that's all I could handle but it was better than nothing.

And I kind of used this mentality when it came to working because on those days where I felt so down and so scared and so anxious, I wasn't my typical self. I wasn't able to sit down and work for eight hours without stopping—not without stopping. But I wasn't able to work my eight-hour day where I would mega batch and all that stuff. So, I started using the 30-minute mentality for my work and here's what I would do. I would set a list of maybe two, maybe three things a day that I wanted to accomplish and then I would block out 30-minute periods throughout the day. So, I would say I'm going to get five 30-minute blocks today and I would check off the blocks as I completed them and in between blocks, I would take a break, I would do something for myself. I would hang out with my family, whatever. The point was that I knew I only had 30 minutes to work so I really worked my butt off in those 30 minutes and I was still able to accomplish what I needed to in that day even though I wasn't working my typical eight-hour days. And here's the thing: little by little, a little became a lot and before I knew it, I was still getting things done just in a different way than I was used to. So, while I still prefer batching and working those larger chunks more often than not, it's important to note that productivity doesn't always come in the form of being a human bulldozer, right? Where you work for hours on end getting things done. Short blocks of time are a great alternative for someone who doesn't want to necessarily or feel like sitting there for hours on end working.

Okay. Now let's flip the situation and talk about what happens when we have too many things we want to work on so we don't know where to start, we don't know where to focus our energy and we bounce around between all of our desirable tasks without actually finishing something. Once we started settling into our new normal in 2020, I started coming up with a list of things that I knew I wanted to work on and I had such a hard time pinning down exactly what I wanted to be working on that I often found myself spending days bouncing around between all of these things and I wasn't really getting anything accomplished. I knew that if I continued on that path, it would take me a year before any of those big projects were actually finished. So, here's what I did and this is going to sound so basic and so simple and obvious but I'm telling you it worked and it's a system that I'm going to use from here on out. I chose six major things that I knew I had to work on and get done in the next three months and I'll tell you what those things were. I had to do my TPT conference presentation, I had to gather all of my tax stuff because hello, deadline extension, totally took advantage of that, I had to batch my next round of content, I had to write that dumb math book that I referenced on the previous podcast show and I knew I had to support members of my course, the finishing framework and also my School of Sellers group and I also wanted to work on back to school products and digital product conversion.

So, what I did was I hung a little clothesline on my office wall right in front of where I work and I pinned a card onto the clothesline for each of these things. So, I had six cards staring at me straight in the face every single day when I would sit down at my office desk and my computer and if I found myself spending time on something that was not on the wall, I stopped and redirected myself. Sounds super simple and kind of silly but it seriously worked. Also, it was a great feeling to take those cards off after things were done. So, if you're struggling to stay on track with your focus, then that is a super helpful thing and it doesn't have to be six things. You could do two or three things. If you really want to hone in a certain product line or a certain deadline for your products, then I suggest making this clothesline and sticking to it and put it in a place where it's visible, where you can see it and remind yourself like hey, I'm not supposed to be working on anything else except for these things.

So, just like everything else in our business, I think it's important to adapt to changes and be open to changing the way that we work because our brains aren't consistent in the way that they think and the way that they operate. So, we have to be ready to bend our rules and our routines and the way that we work in order to fit our focus. So, if you are someone who is feeling these focus struggles whether you have too much to do or you're just not feeling it, you can go to ErinMWaters.com/focus to get more information and any of the tools that I mentioned in today's episode. Thank you so much for tuning in and I will talk to you next week.

Welcome to the School of Sellers

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We are a group that is committed to helping teacher sellers in all stages of their business. We like to provide tips, tools, and resources that aid in building your business while making it feel doable every step of the way.

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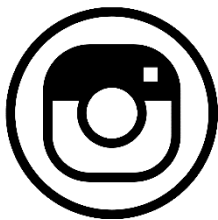
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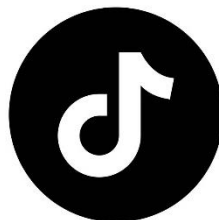
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