

STEVER

Stever Robbins here. Welcome to the Get It Done Guy's quick and dirty tips to work less and do more. Today's topic is staying on task when we get distracted. The quick and dirty tip is to use external reminders to stay on task.

ROBBINS:

Natalie writes, "Dear Get It Done Guy, I need help. Every time I try to do something, I get distracted and then forget the task I should have been doing. Do you have any tips on dealing with distractions?"

Do I have tips on dealing with distractions. Of course! The very question itself reminds me of that time in third grade. I was playing with the yellow silly putty, and Leslie Goldstein was playing with a red hammer. Well of course, even then, I realized that yellow and red would make a great clothing combination. So I went straight over to the finger paint, grabbed some library paste. Yum! Tasty! And headed towards Leslie with a single-minded determination. Oh, where was I? Distractions. Right.

It's easy to get distracted. Humans are built that way. We have built-in distractions called daydreams. We'll be sitting in math class, and the instant the teacher writes an equation on the board, WAM! We're sitting on a desert island, sipping fruit flavored beverages, enjoying the sun as we are fanned with palm fronds.

Then we hear our name, as if through a far off veil. Stever? Mr. Robbins? Are you listening to me? What is the value of x ? Oh cow patties. Back to reality.

What brought us back to reality was an outside force, and there's the secret. We get distracted from the inside. We do it by making the distractions seem more important than the thing we're supposed to be paying attention to. It's April 15th, 9:00 PM. Taxes are due at the post office by midnight. And yet, rescuing our clean underwear from the dryer is suddenly the most important thing in our lives.

By the way, after writing that sentence, I ran downstairs to empty the dryer. Then my Twitter friend Henry sent me to a cool YouTube video. Two hours later, I'm back.

Since it's outside that brings us back, we're going to create an outside tool to save us from distraction. This tip is from Carol Gignoux of ADD Insights, and this episode's transcript links to a full interview with her. She's a woman after my own heart. She recommends using a pad and

paper. She calls it your "capture pad."

Capture the distraction and keep working. Grab a pad of paper. I use a small sticky pad. When an outside distraction happens, don't be distracted. Instead, jot down the distraction on your sticky pad and send it away. Then, when you reach a handy breaking point, check your pad and follow up on any distractions that need attention.

For instance, let's say Bernice drops by to drop off her sales figures, and to show off her latest Lycra and rhinestone jumpsuit and matching clutch. It is shiny. You say. Politely, "Thanks for the sales figures, Bernice. I'd love to discuss your outfit, but I'm in the middle of a report. I'll swing by your office as soon as I'm at a breaking point. See you soon!"

As soon as the afterimages fade, jot down on your sticky pad, "Visit Bernice," and keep working. When you're done with your Southwest sales report, you look down at your pad, and you know it's time to grab some anti-nausea medication and head off to see Bernice's new outfit. Capture the work, and keep distracting.

Sometimes, though, the distraction really is more important if you've been pursuing a most excellent job candidate for the last six months and if that candidate drops by your office for one last chat before they accept the job offer taking the meeting might be more important than finishing your report. In that case, your little pad will once again save you. Only this time, don't jot down the interruption. Jot down where you were in your report, and what the next steps are. "Just incorporated Bernice's sales figures. About to calculate totals for the region."

Now you can give your candidate your full attention, knowing that as soon as you're done, a quick glance at your sticky pad will help you get right back into your sales report where you left off. Attention deficit disorder? Some people are diagnosed with ADD, Attention Deficit Disorder. They actually can't control where their attention wanders. I can relate. I'll be working with a customer who needs attention. Boom! I put him on hold for a coworker who calls with an Emergency Then an instant message pops up offering me 30 seconds to buy male pattern baldness cream at 38% off. A moon-walking bear wanders through a basketball game, and my boss sends an email asking for three new projects, all quote unquote "Top priority."

If I'm not ADD to start with, by the end of the day, I am sure feeling that way. Being a sneaky bugger this week, I interviewed Carol Gignoux of ADD Insights. You can link to the interview from this episode's transcripts. Carol works with ADD people to help create systems that help them focus and complete things. Of course, the tips work for everyone, ADD or not. So I

pretend to have ADD so she'll give me more advice. And you can share by visiting getitdone.quickanddirtytips.com to listen to Carol.

On a whole other topic, it's easy to get distracted by trying to understand how to make your computer do something that should be simple. But if you want to use GoToMyPC to access your computer from anywhere on the internet, it is simple. Even a total non-techie can be up in minutes, accessing files, folders, and applications. For a 30 day free trial, just visit GoToMyPC.com/podcast.

This is Stever Robbins. Email questions to getitdone.quickanddirtytips.com or leave voicemail at 866-WRK-LESS. Find the Interview with Carol Gignoux and a fun YouTube video at getitdone.quickanddirtytips.com. Work less, do more, and have a great life.