The Science of Productivity and Performance in Our Busy, Always-On World

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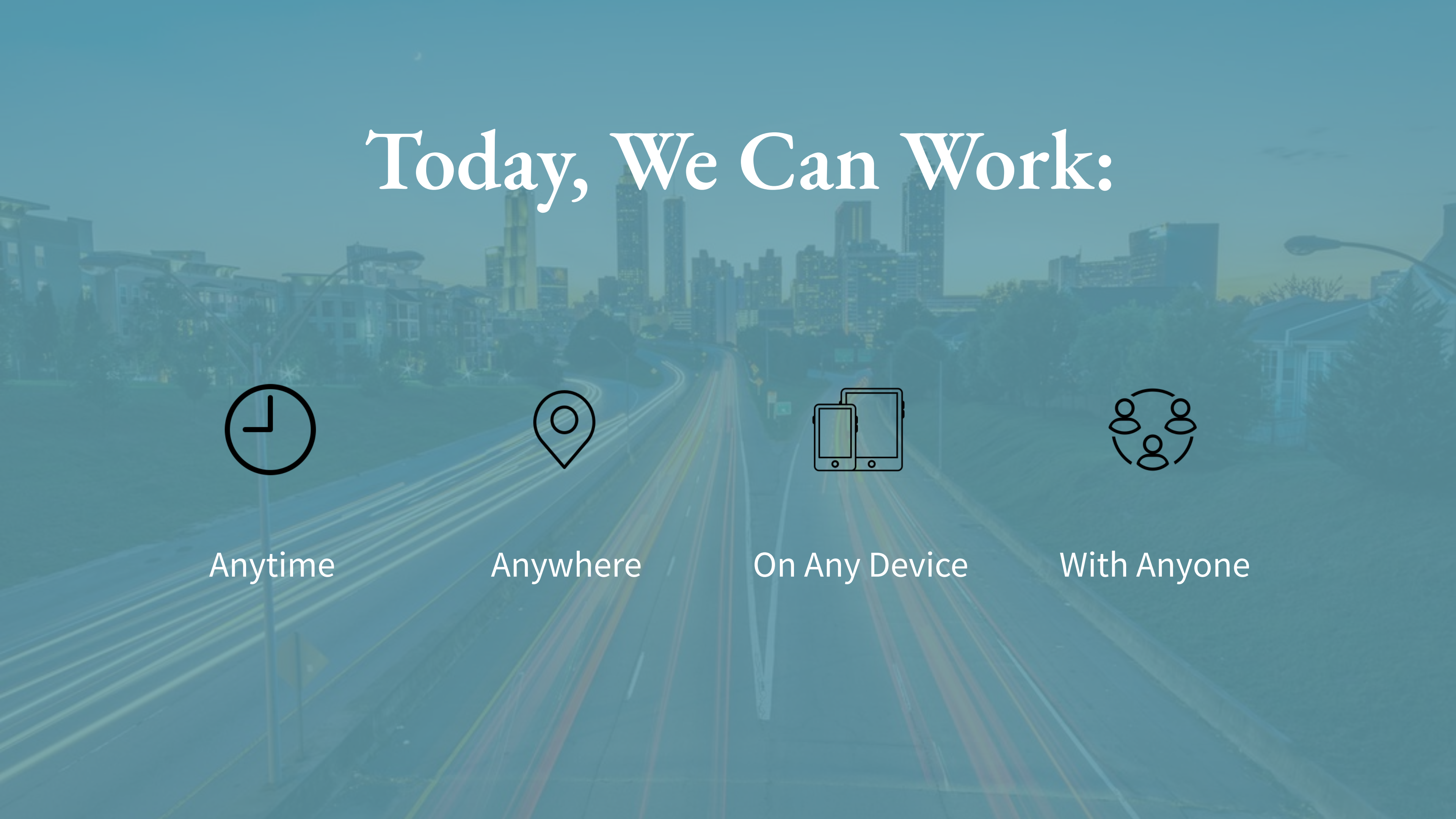


Today, We Can Work:

Anytime

Anywhere

On Any Device

With Anyone

Yet We Struggle to Get Things Done More than Ever Before

Our Productivity Has Been Hijacked

Constant Interruptions

Excessive Email/ Communications

Unproductive Meetings

An Alarming, Deteriorating Reality

3.5 hours or less

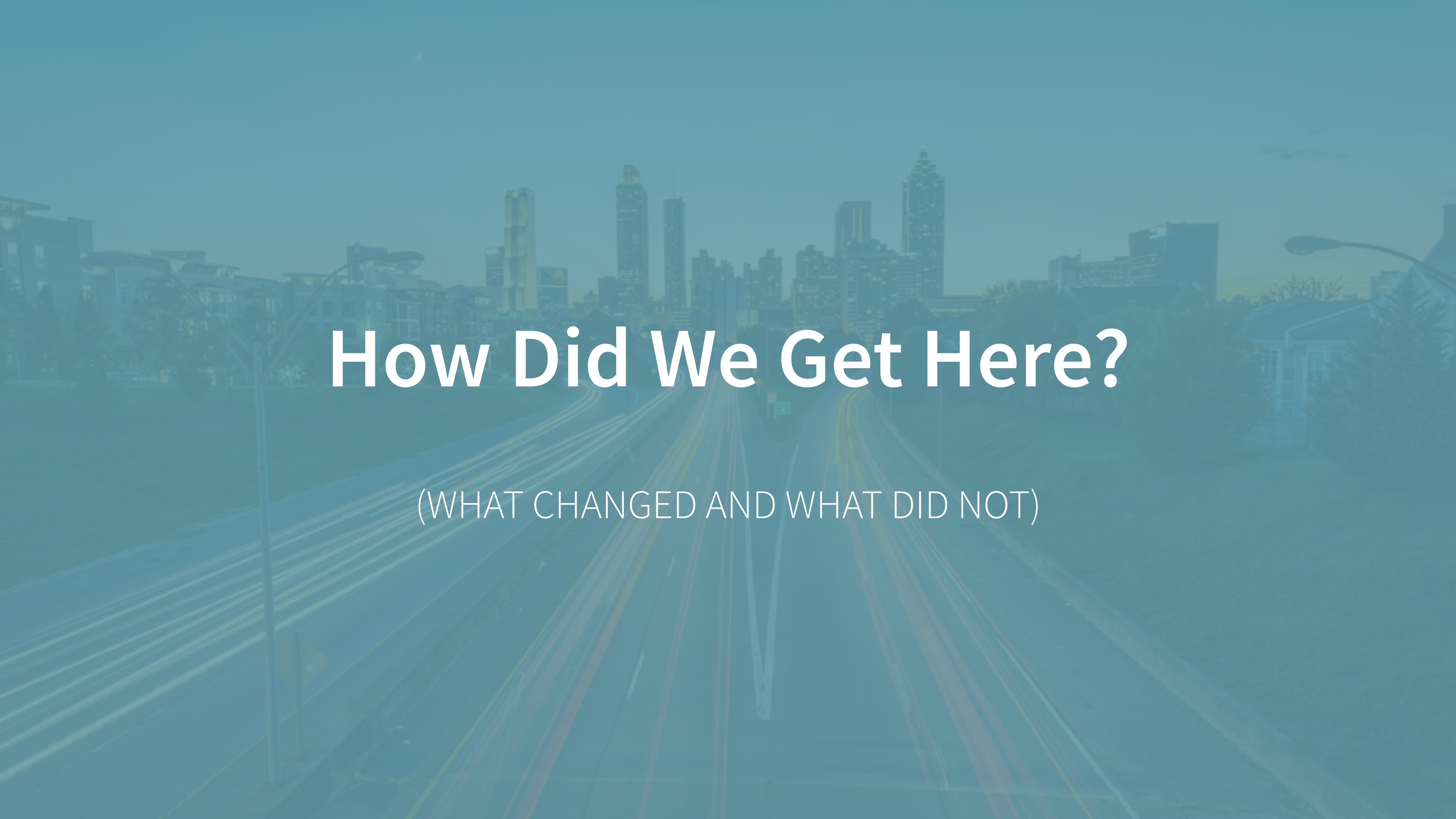
Portion of workday
that is considered
focused and productive

ATLASSIAN

90 seconds

Average amount of time
between knowledge
worker interruptions

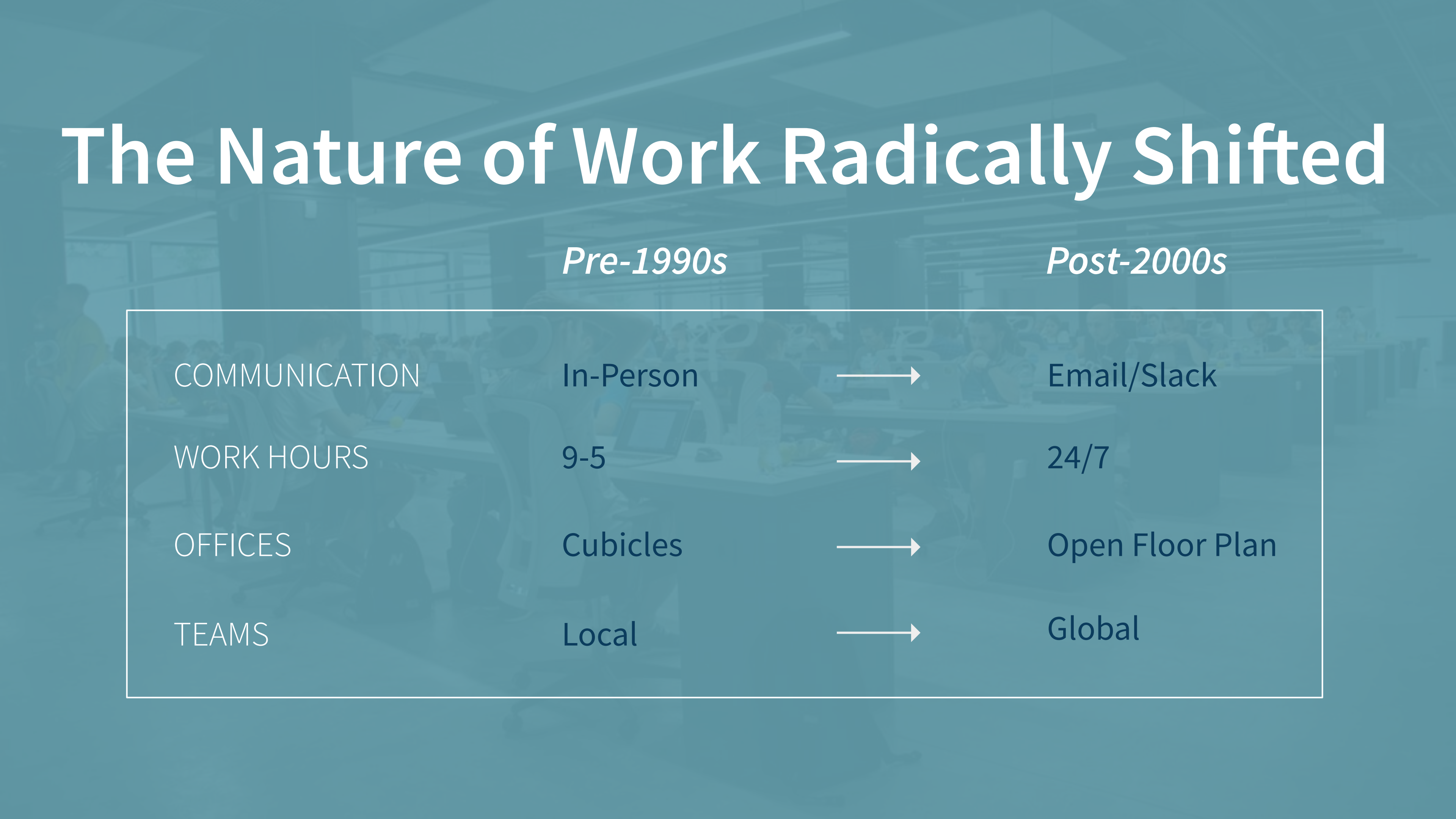
UC IRVINE



How Did We Get Here?

(WHAT CHANGED AND WHAT DID NOT)

The Nature of Work Radically Shifted



	Pre-1990s		*Post-2000s*
COMMUNICATION	In-Person	→	Email/Slack
WORK HOURS	9-5	→	24/7
OFFICES	Cubicles	→	Open Floor Plan
TEAMS	Local	→	Global

But Human Brains Did Not…

HOW DO WE ACTUALLY SOLVE THIS PROBLEM?

We Need to Stop Fighting and Work in Line With Our Biology

What to Expect Today

- 6 biggest mistakes of WFH
- The scientific reasons behind WHY people commonly make those mistakes and what to do instead

MISTAKE #1

Muddled Associations

1

Our behavior is driven by our neural networks

Stimulus → Neural Activation → Behavior

You are in a quiet area.

Home Associations are At Odds With Work

1. Design Cognitive Associations

The Ideal Set Up?

- Dedicated workspace in a separate or private area

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD
GOOD TIMES

1. Design Cognitive Associations

The Ideal Set Up?

- Dedicated workspace in a separate or private area

No Space?

- Use a physical/sensory trigger to automatically enter Focus mode
  - Music
  - Candle
  - Table cloth
  - Clothes
  - Beverage / mug

Spotify®

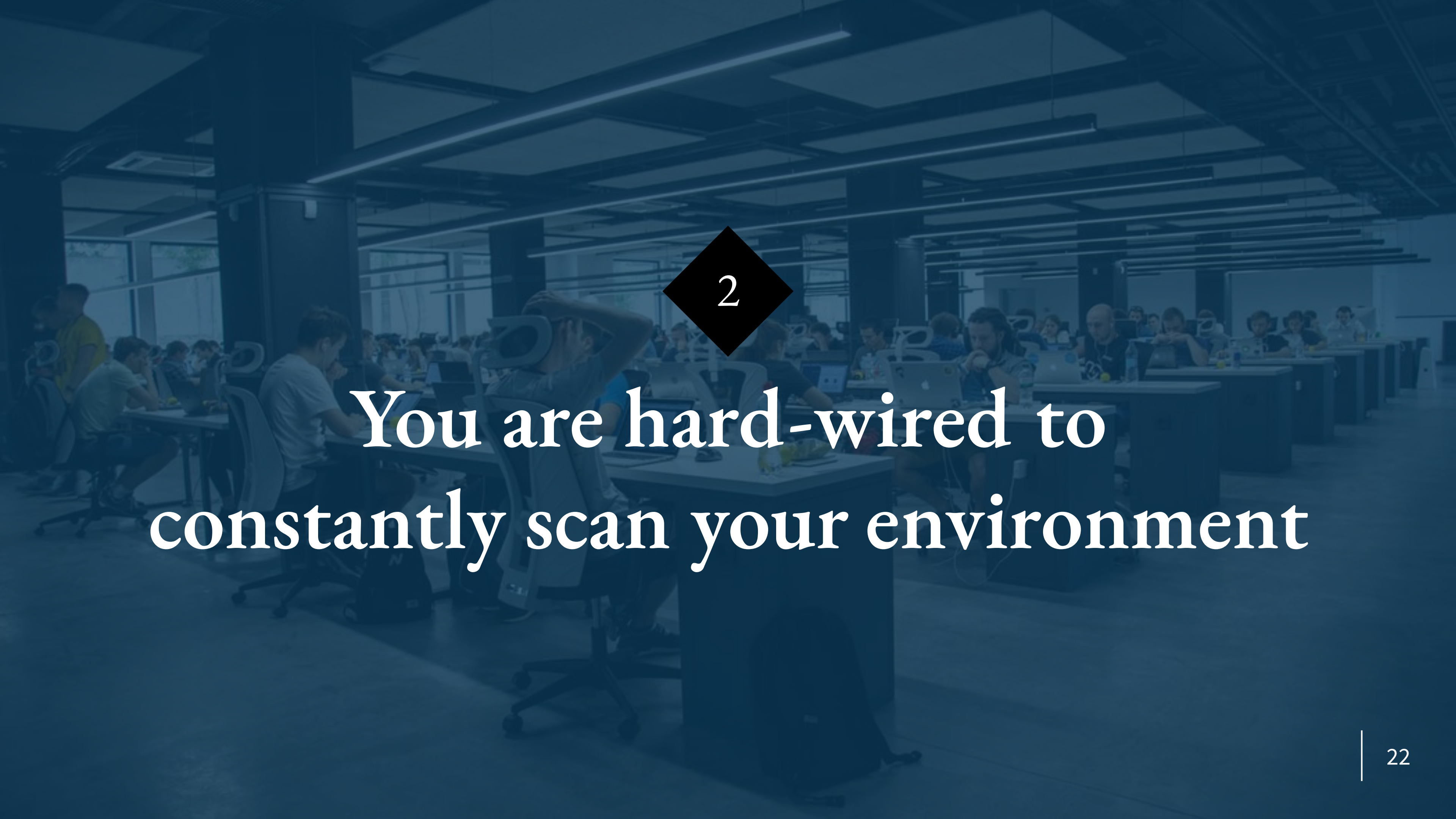
1. Design Cognitive Associations

Have a Trigger to Turn Off

- Ramp down music
- Mug / beverage
- Consistent sleep position

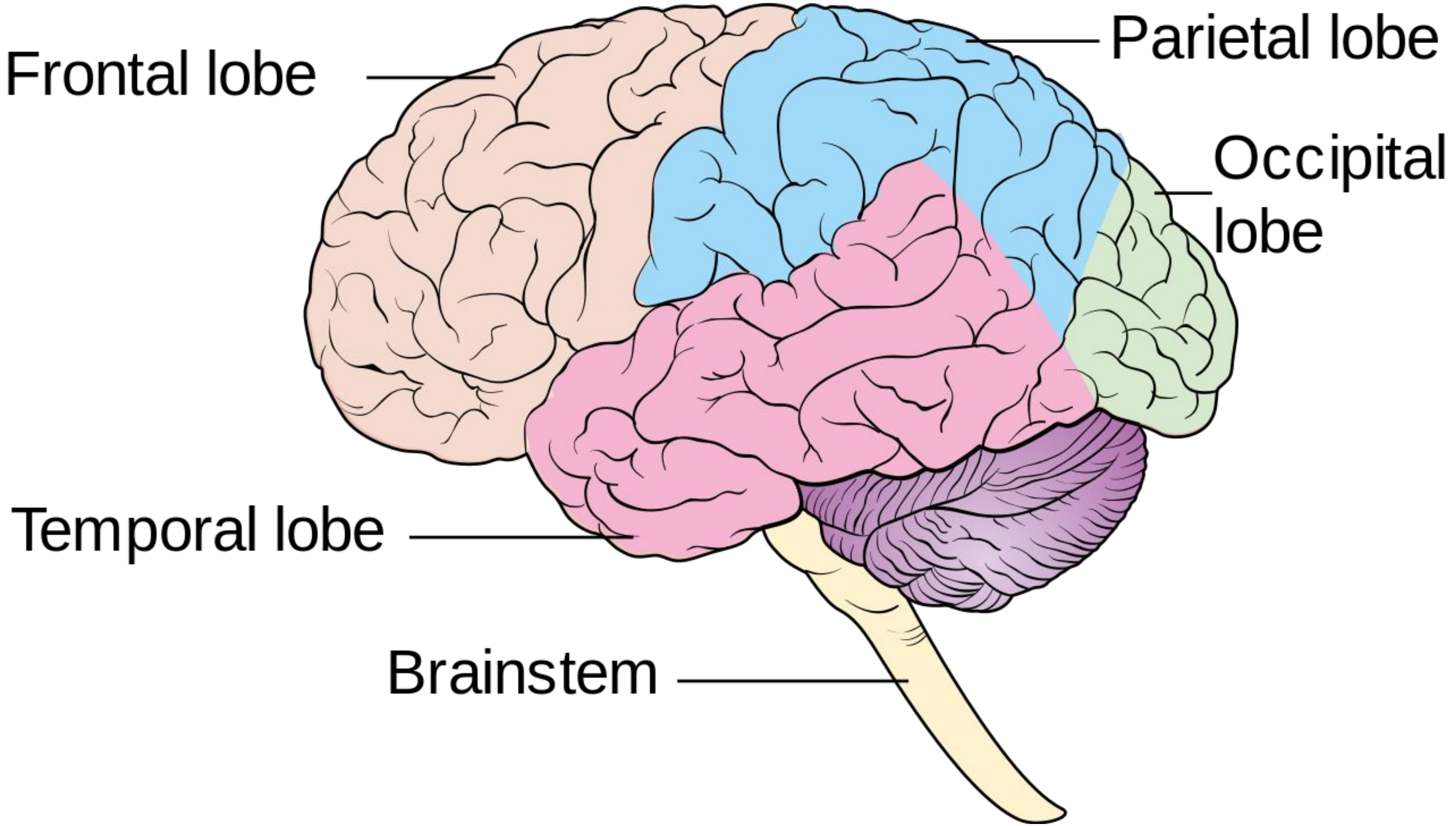
MISTAKE #2

Poor Hygiene



2

You are hard-wired to constantly scan your environment


Frontal lobe
Parietal lobe
Occipital lobe
Temporal lobe
Brainstem

STUDY

Visual Distractions Reduce Productivity and Increase Cortisol

Constant faces and movement

All potentially relevant

STUDIES

Auditory Distractions Make You Slower

Background noise (especially intelligible speech) → up to 10% performance decrement

STUDIES

Auditory Distractions Make You Slower

Background noise (especially intelligible speech) → up to 10% performance decrement

2. Protect Your Sensory Systems

Visual

- Create a visual barrier / wall

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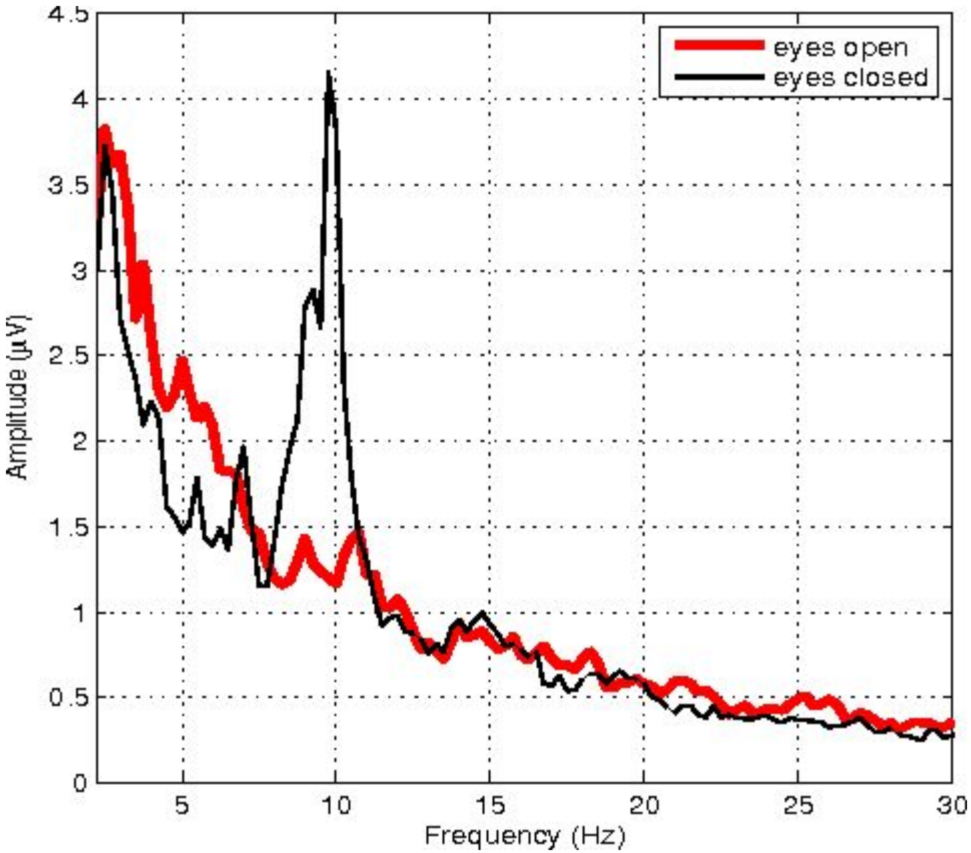
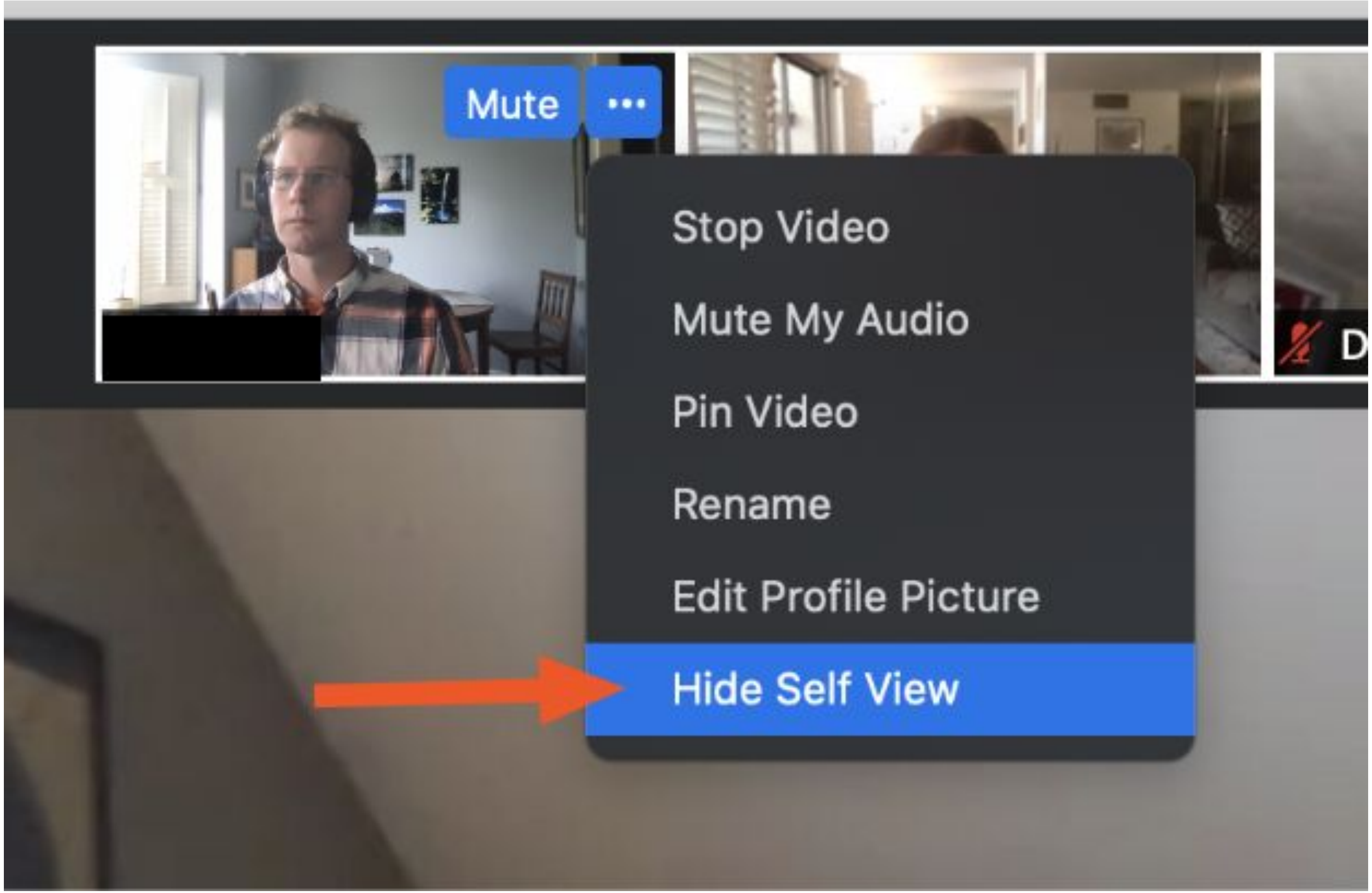
Visual

- Create a visual barrier / wall
- Turn toward a wall / away from foot traffic
- Close your eyes
- Hide “Self View”

BURGER/PHANIE


eyes open
eyes closed
Amplitude (μV)
0
0.5
1
1.5
2
2.5
3
3.5
4
4.5
5
10
15
20
25
30
Frequency (Hz)


Mute
•••
Stop Video
Mute My Audio
Pin Video
Rename
Edit Profile Picture
Hide Self View
D

[redacted]

2. Protect Your Sensory Systems

Visual

- Create a visual barrier / wall
- Turn toward a wall / away from foot traffic
- Close your eyes
- Hide "Self View"

Auditory

- Noise-cancelling headphones
- Music with no lyrics or lyrics you don't understand

Now for the biggest drain...

STUDY

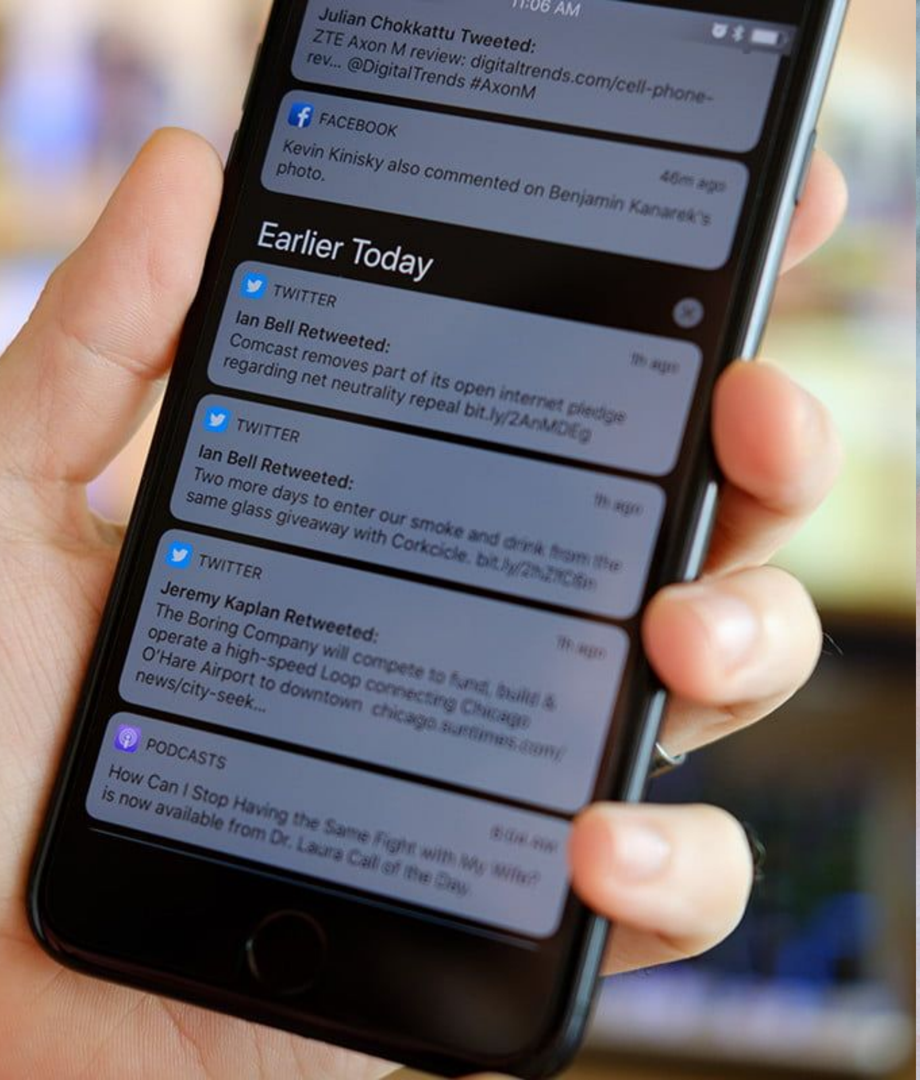
Cognitive Capacity vs. Phone Location

STUDY

Cognitive Capacity vs. Phone Location

“The mere presence of a smartphone reduces brain power, even if it’s turned over and even if it’s off.”

CELL PHONES
in basket



Julian Chokkattu Tweeted:
ZTE Axon M review: digitaltrends.com/cell-phone-rev... @DigitalTrends #AxonM

FACEBOOK 46m ago
Kevin Kinisky also commented on Benjamin Kanarek's photo.

Earlier Today

TWITTER 1h ago
Ian Bell Retweeted:
Comcast removes part of its open internet pledge regarding net neutrality repeal bit.ly/2AnMDEg

TWITTER 1h ago
Ian Bell Retweeted:
Two more days to enter our smoke and drink from the same glass giveaway with Corkcicle. bit.ly/[illegible]

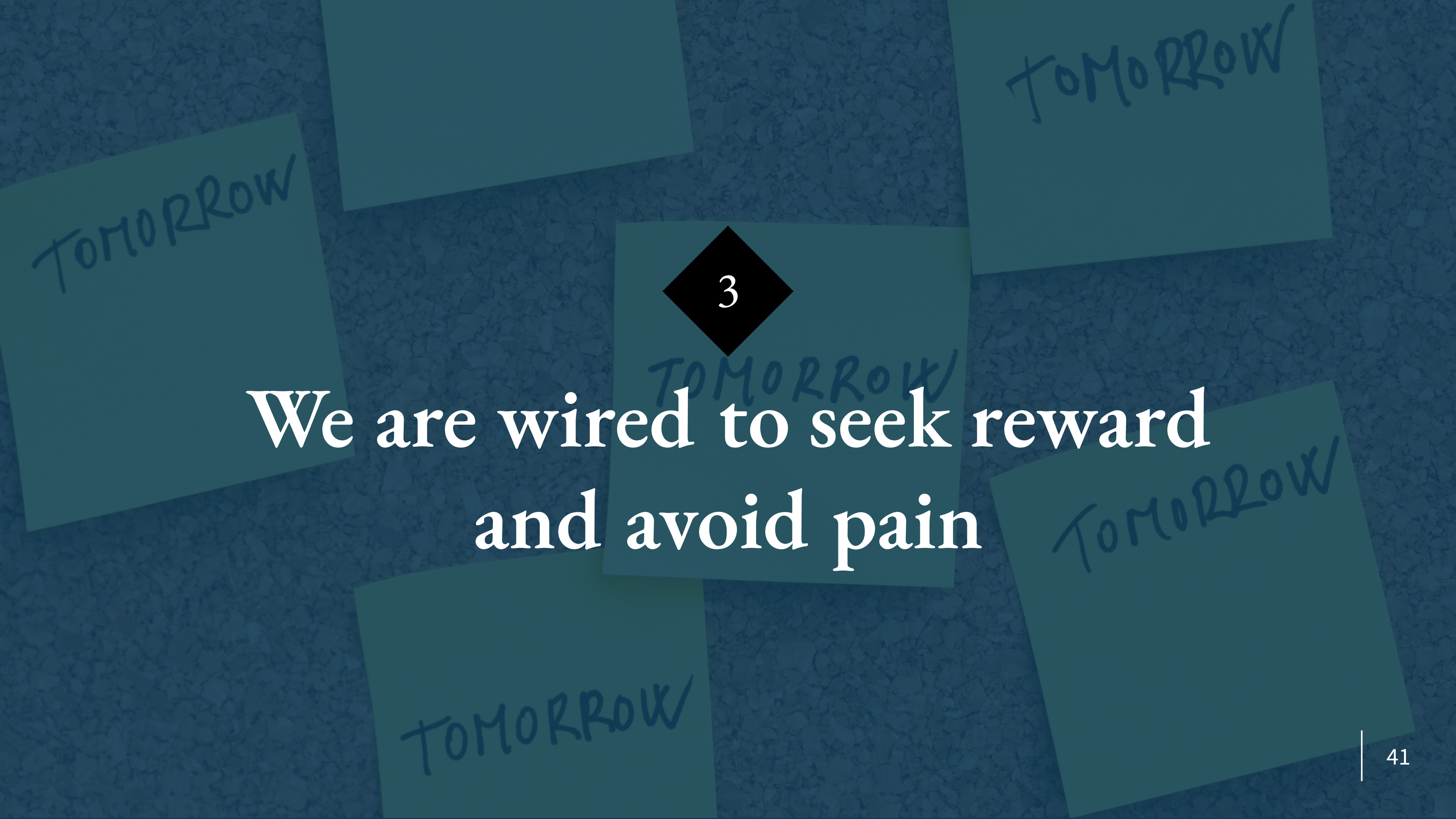
TWITTER 1h ago
Jeremy Kaplan Retweeted:
The Boring Company will compete to fund, build & operate a high-speed Loop connecting Chicago O'Hare Airport to downtown chicago.suntimes.com/news/city-seek...

PODCASTS 6:04 AM
How Can I Stop Having the Same Fight with My Wife? is now available from Dr. Laura Call of the Day.

12:25
Google Calendar
Photos
Camera
Google Maps
WeatherNetwork
Clock
Calculator
Casts
Pocket
App Store
GoogleKe...
YouTube
Contacts
Transit
Drive
Settings
Spotify
AudioNote2
Hangouts
Slack
2
64

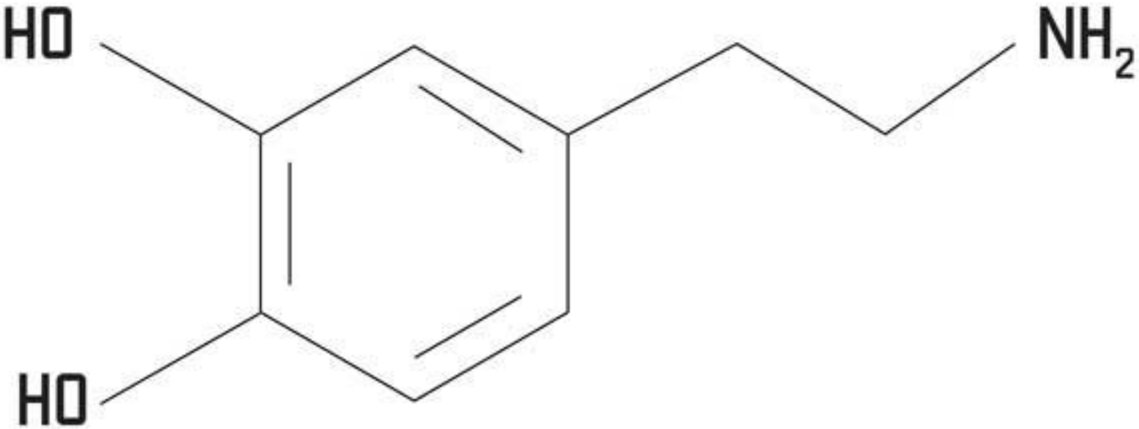
MISTAKE #3

Being a Passenger

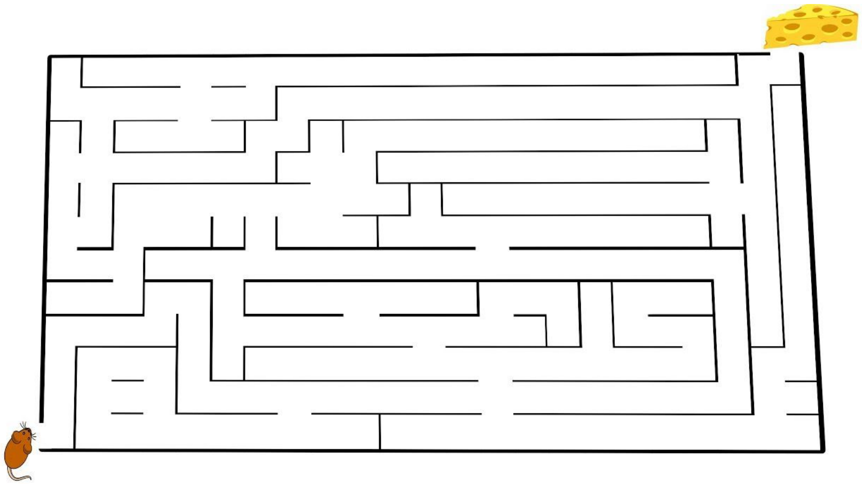

TOMORROW
TOMORROW
TOMORROW
TOMORROW
TOMORROW

3

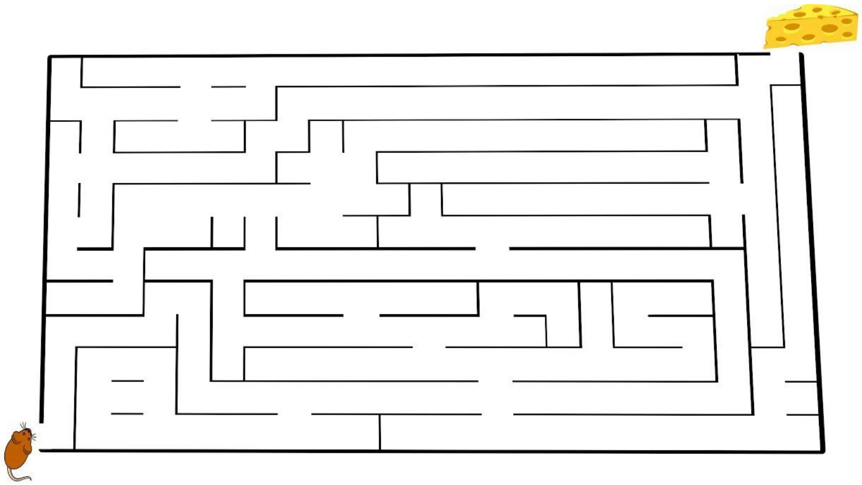
We are wired to seek reward and avoid pain

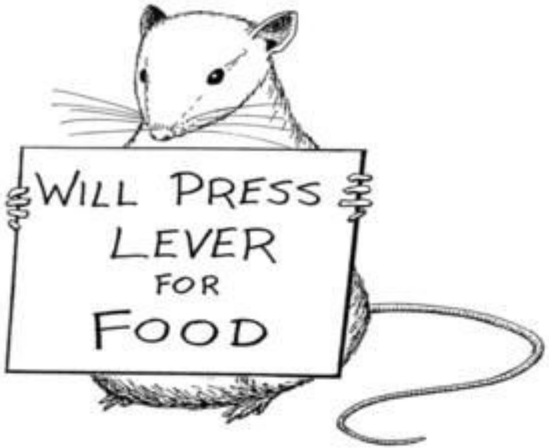


DOPAMINE



Slow Dopamine




WILL PRESS
LEVER
FOR
FOOD

Slow Dopamine

Fast Dopamine

MITs → Slow Dopamine

LITs → Fast Dopamine

“What is your unique contribution?”

3. Focus on Contribution

Most Impactful

- Prioritize your MITs (maximum 1-3) each day
- Avoid procrastination and accelerate execution by making MITs look like LITs

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Quick Win

- Know and ruthlessly de-prioritize your LITs

MISTAKE #4

Constant Expenditure

4

The hours of the day are not equal

Biological Chronotypes

	Population Distribution
Type 1: AM-Shifted	20-25%
Type 2: Bi-Phasic	50+%
Type 3: PM-Shifted	~20%

Biological Chronotypes

	Population Distribution
Type 1: AM-Shifted	20-25%
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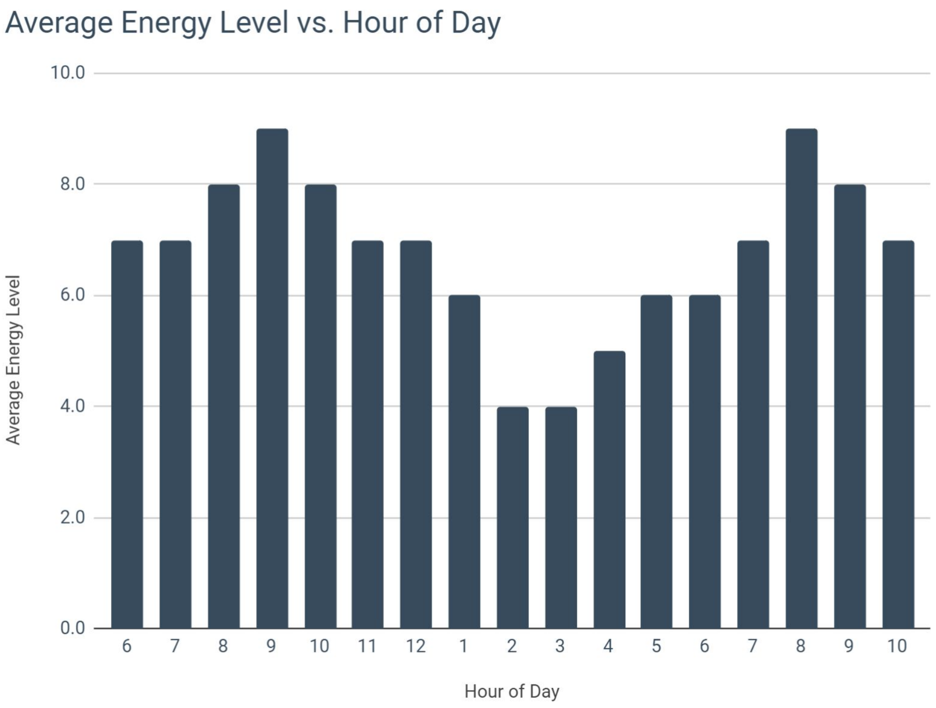


Mychronotype.com

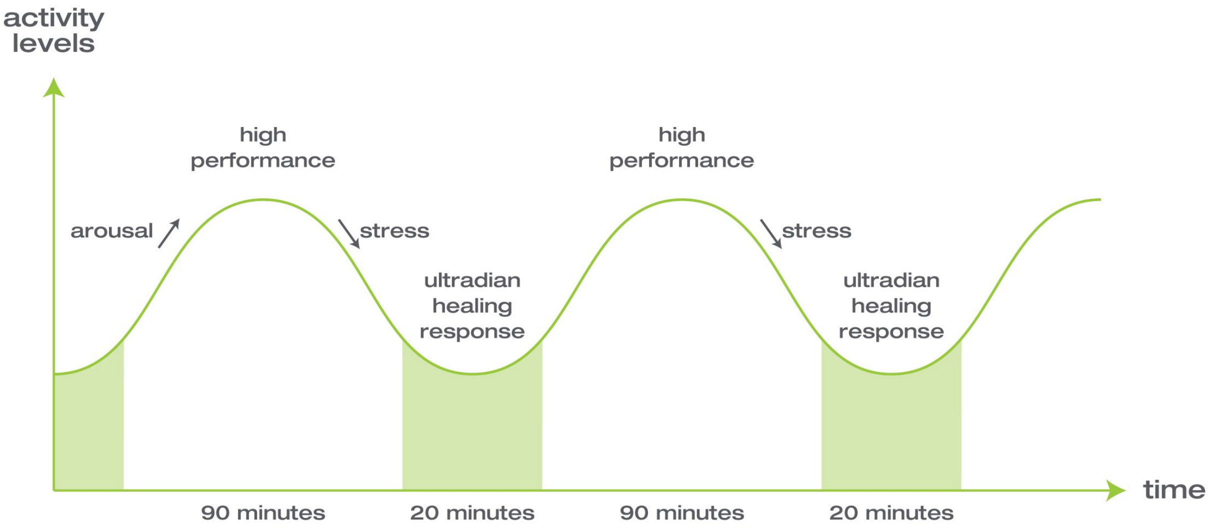
Code: gobears

4. Strategically Design Your Day

Most Impactful

- Protect your 1 of your Peak Performance Hours for strategic, cognitively intensive, high-value work
- Take periodic, brain breaks to regain energy and motivation

Ultradian Rhythms


activity levels
high performance
high performance
arousal
stress
stress
ultradian healing response
ultradian healing response
time
90 minutes
20 minutes
90 minutes
20 minutes

Source: Basic rest-activity cycle (Kleitman, 1982)

4. Strategically Design Your Day

Most Impactful

- Protect 1 of your Peak Performance Hours for strategic, cognitively intensive, high-value work
- Take periodic, “cognitive” breaks to regain energy and motivation

Quick Wins

- Schedule an email or administrative sprint during a low-energy period of the day

Intense Exercise Does Not Reverse the Negative Impacts of Chronic Sitting

MISTAKE #5

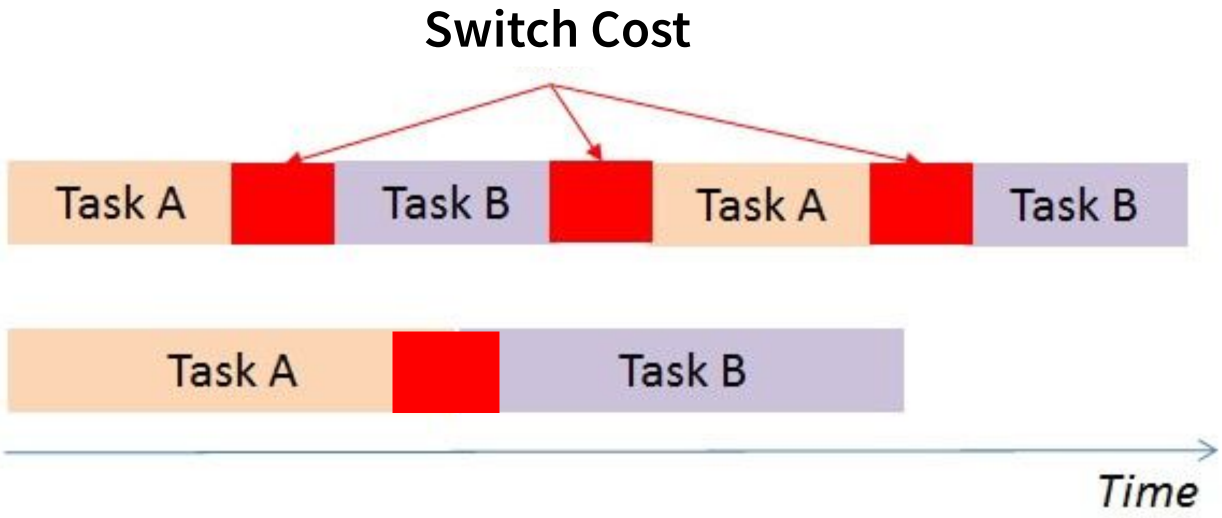
Excessive Task-Switching

5

You pay a fine for every small switch

DIAGRAM

“Multitasking” = Task-Switching


Switch Cost
Task A
Task B
Task A
Task B
Task A
Task B
Time

5. Minimize Switch Cost

Most Impactful

- Mono-task on one task or project at a time (i.e. Focus Sprint)

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- Maximize your screen / close out of email when you’re working

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- Interruptive ideas → record them in "Parking Lot"

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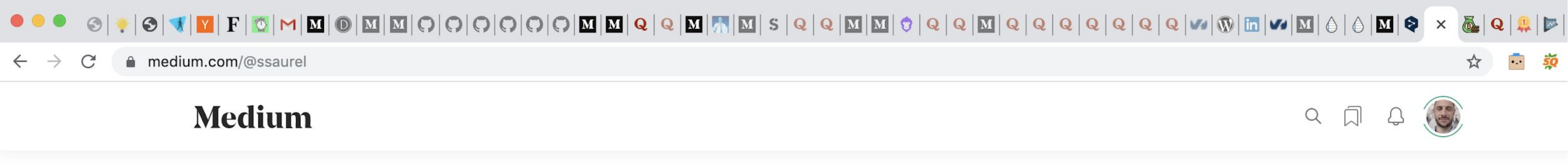
Most Impactful

- Mono-task on one task or project at a time (i.e. Focus Sprint)

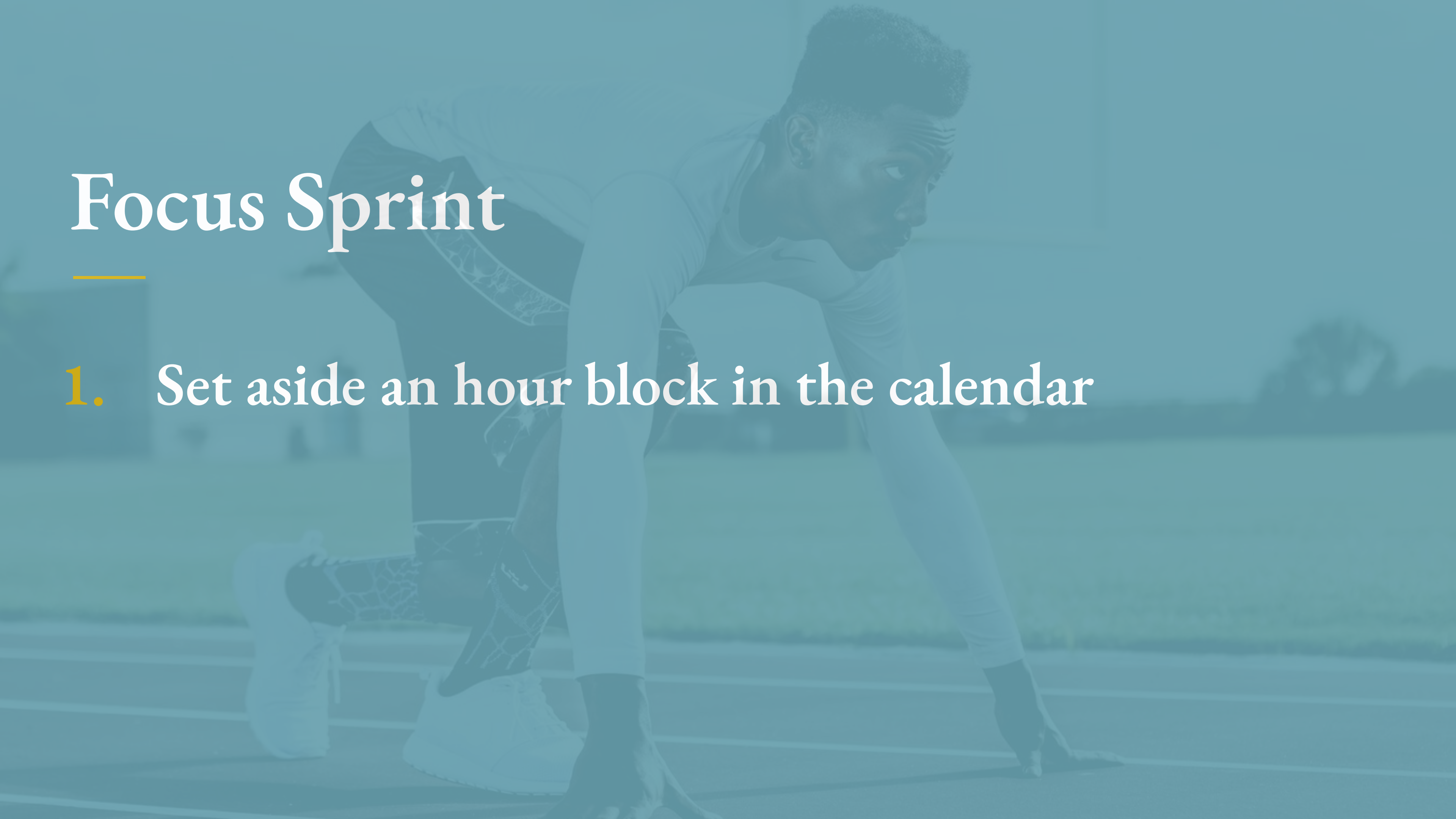
Quick Wins

- Maximize your screen / close out of email when you're working
- Interruptive ideas → record them in "Parking Lot"
- Tab hoarding → create "Active" and "Passive" windows for tabs


medium.com/@ssaurel
Medium

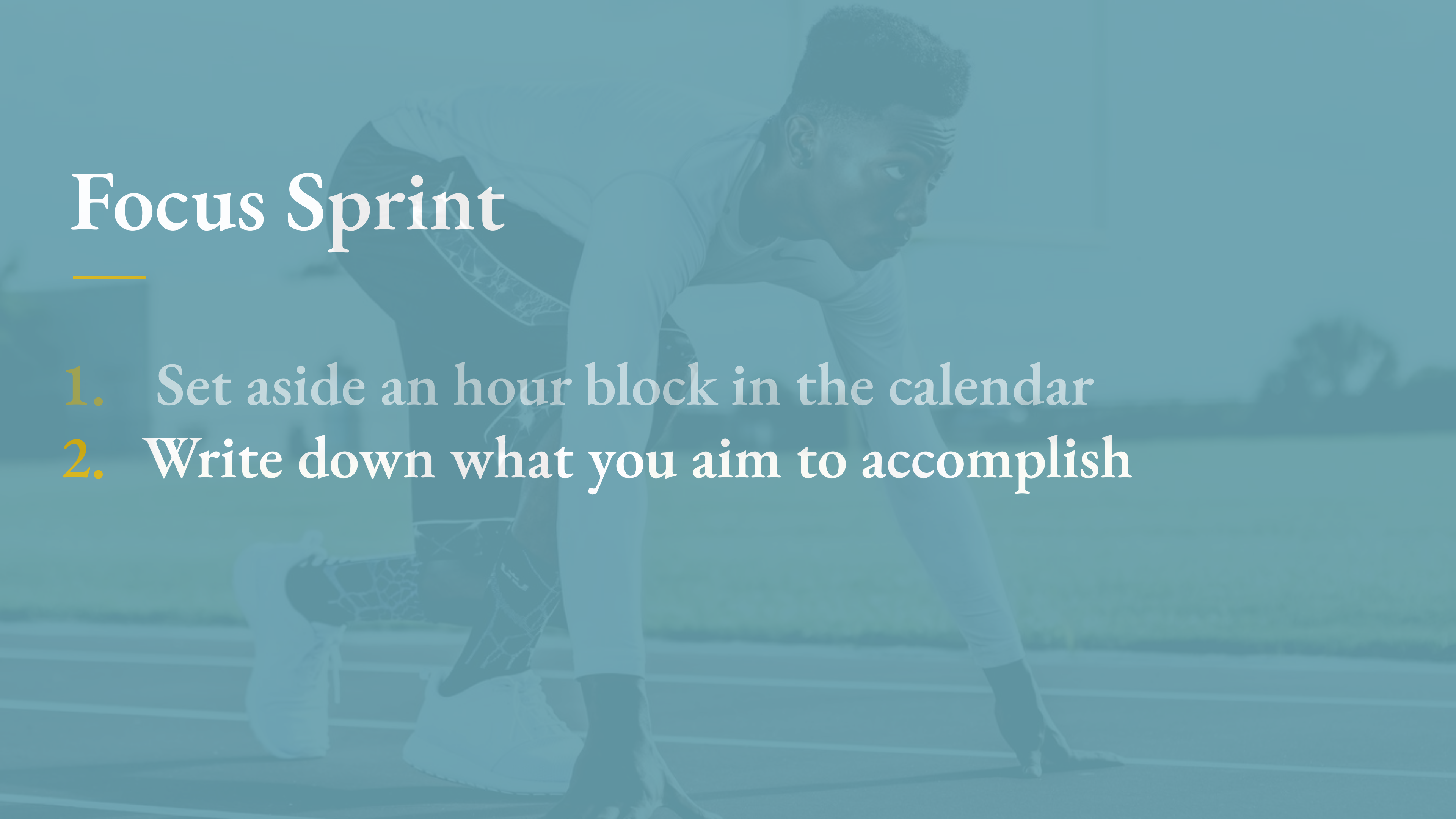
THE SINGLE HIGHEST ROI PRODUCTIVITY METHOD

Focus Sprint



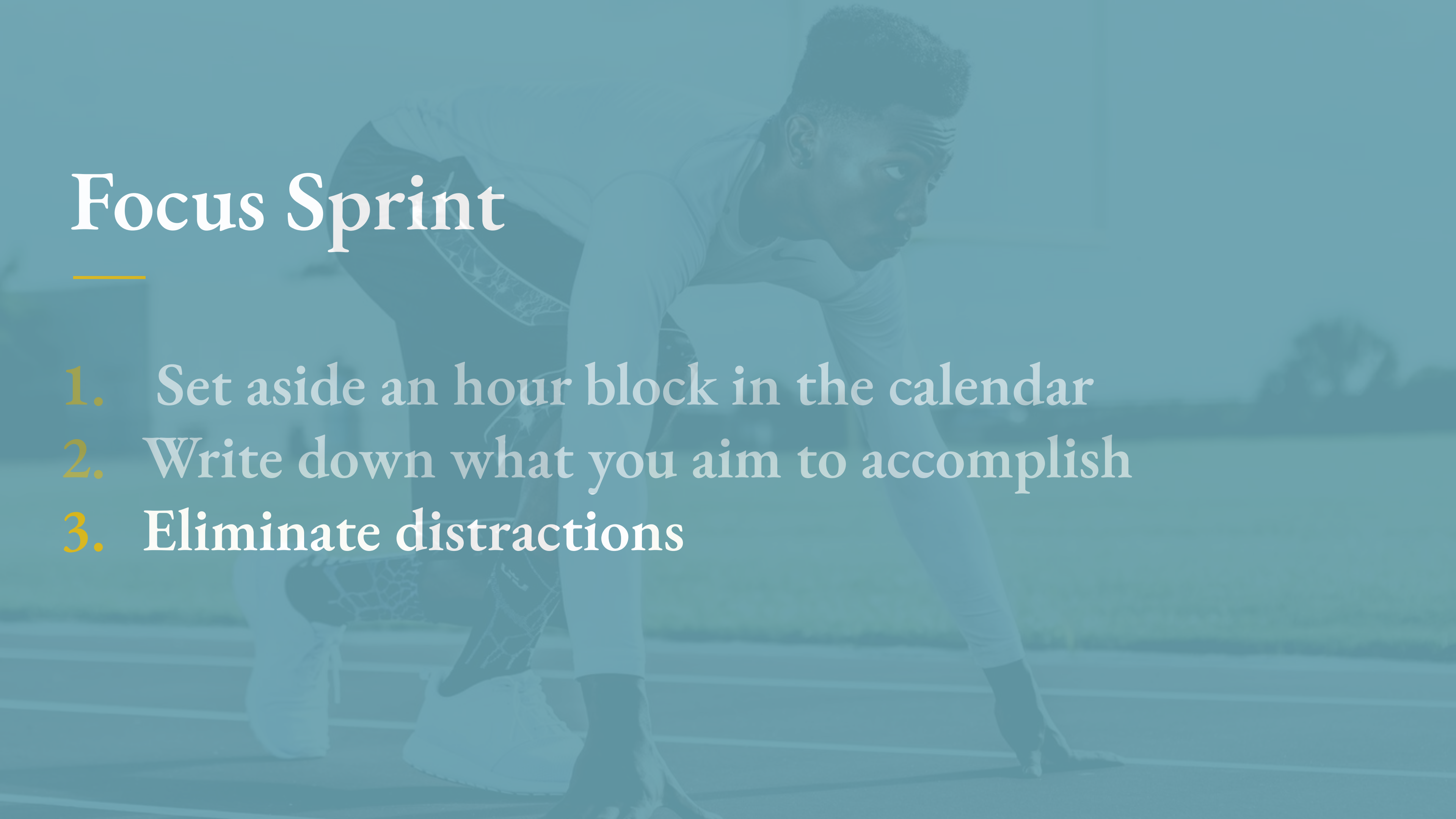
Focus Sprint

1. Set aside an hour block in the calendar



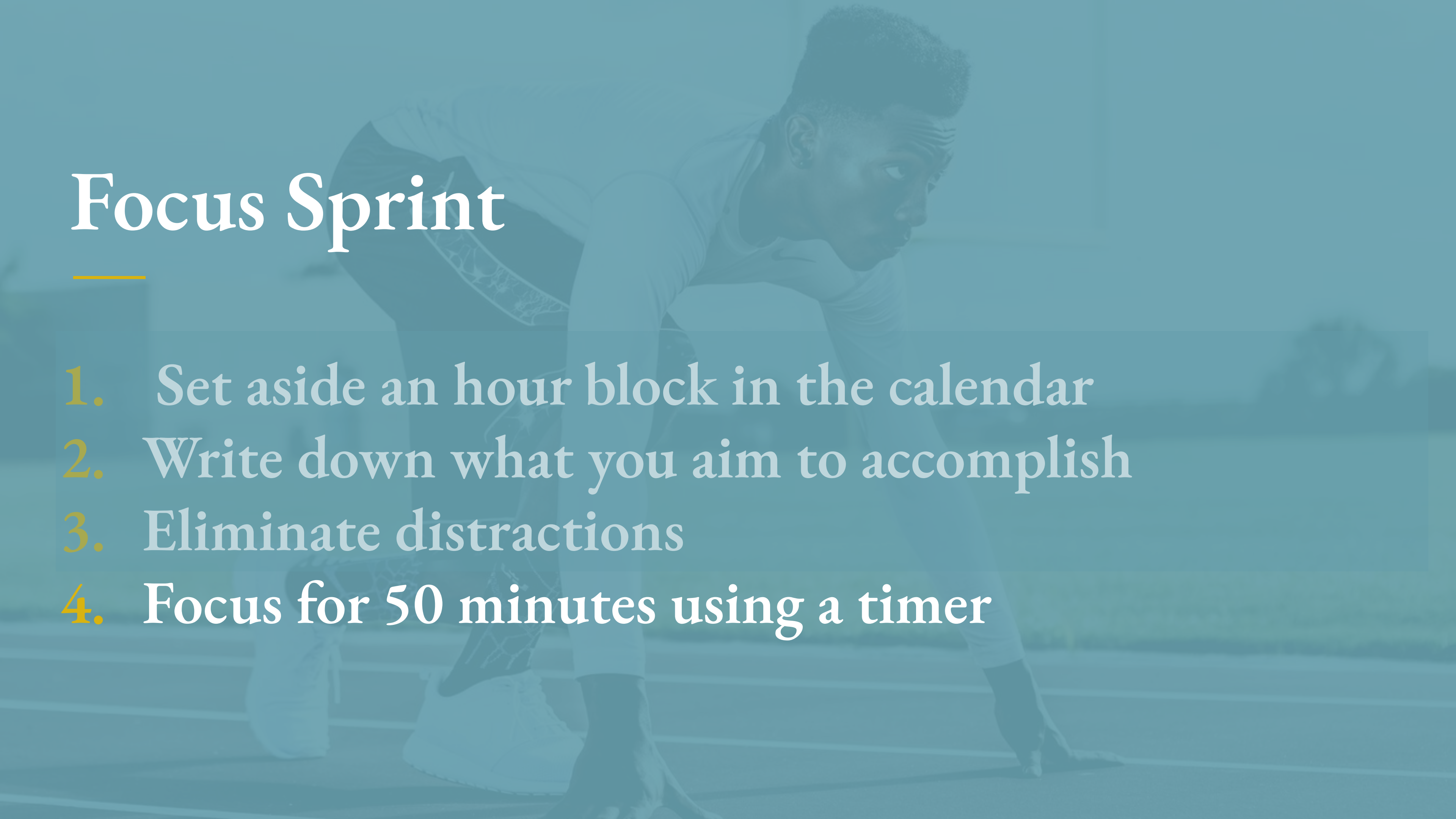
Focus Sprint

1. Set aside an hour block in the calendar
2. Write down what you aim to accomplish



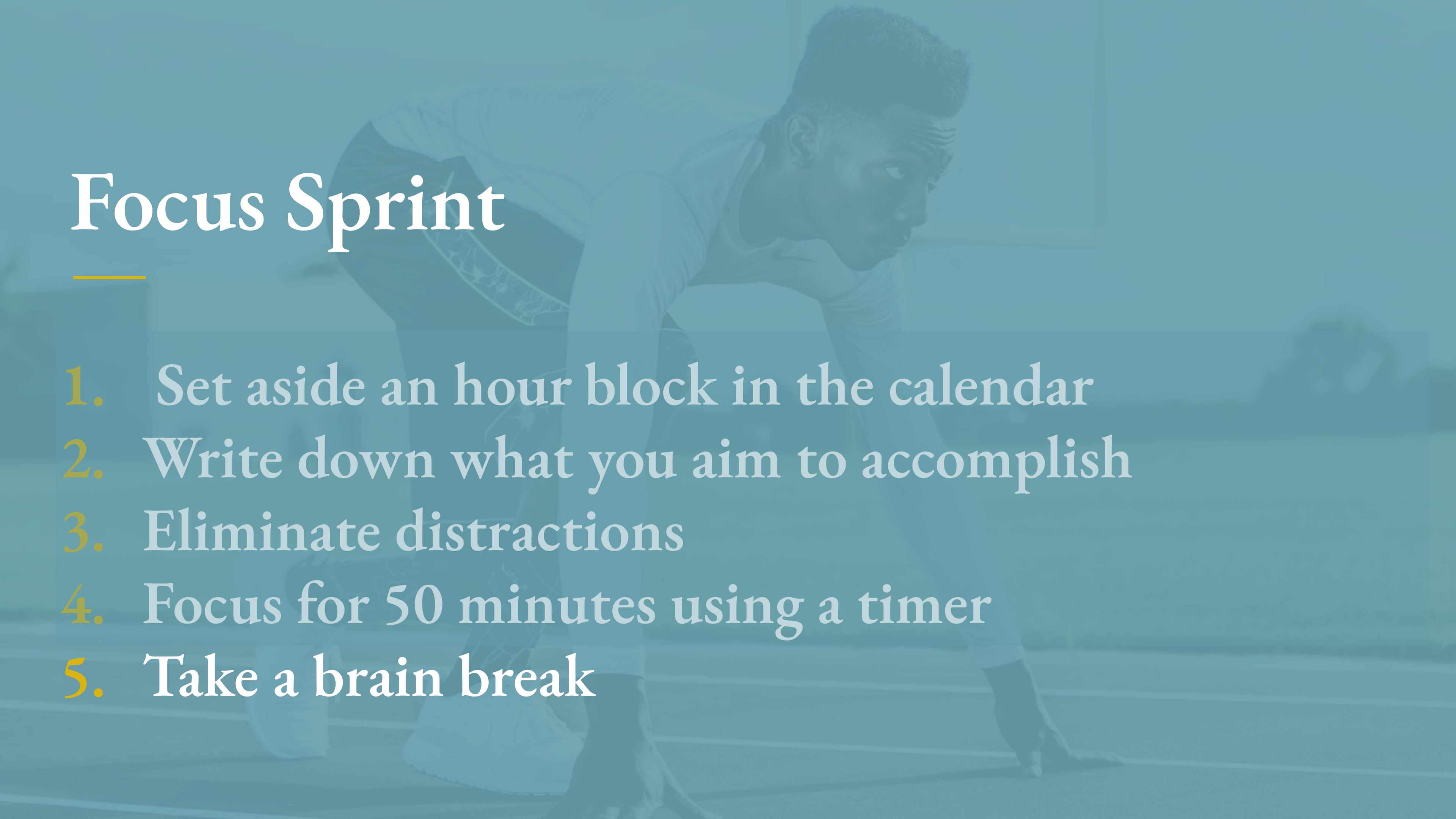
Focus Sprint

1. Set aside an hour block in the calendar
2. Write down what you aim to accomplish
3. Eliminate distractions



Focus Sprint

1. Set aside an hour block in the calendar
2. Write down what you aim to accomplish
3. Eliminate distractions
4. Focus for 50 minutes using a timer



Focus Sprint

1. Set aside an hour block in the calendar
2. Write down what you aim to accomplish
3. Eliminate distractions
4. Focus for 50 minutes using a timer
5. Take a brain break

Outcomes Within 2 Weeks

Google

26% greater individual productivity

MISTAKE #6

Always Being Connected

6

We are afraid of letting down our pack

“If people can’t see me,
how will they know I am working?”

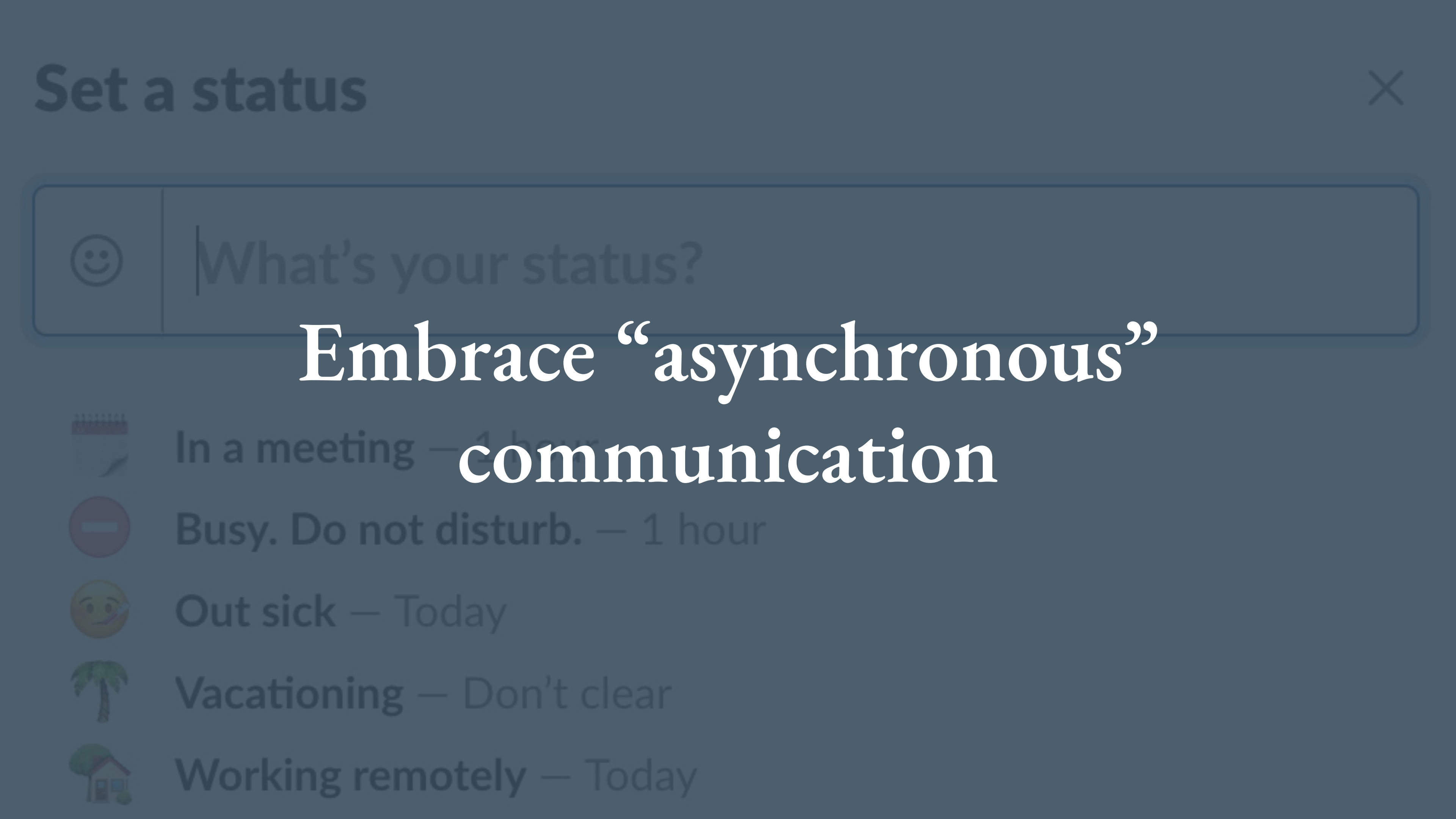
STUDY

Remote/Flexible Work Leads to Hyper-Responsiveness

- The freedom to choose when and where one works typically leads to perpetual presenteeism (i.e. hyper-responsiveness) out of obligation

Cranfield
School of
Management

Embrace “asynchronous” communication


Set a status
What’s your status?
In a meeting — 1 hour
Busy. Do not disturb. — 1 hour
Out sick — Today
Vacationing — Don’t clear
Working remotely — Today

6. Combat Constant Connectivity

Most Impactful

- Create an urgent line for others or enable VIP notifications

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Most Impactful

- Create an urgent line for others

Quick Win

- Batch process your responses to email/chat (e.g. every 30 or 60 minutes)

STUDY

Email “Batchers” Report Greater Productivity and Lower Cortisol

- People who primarily check email through self-interruptions report higher productivity compared to those who rely on notifications.
- The less daily time spent on email, the lower measured stress.

Massachusetts
Institute of
Technology

IF YOU WANT TO BE 25+% MORE PRODUCTIVE

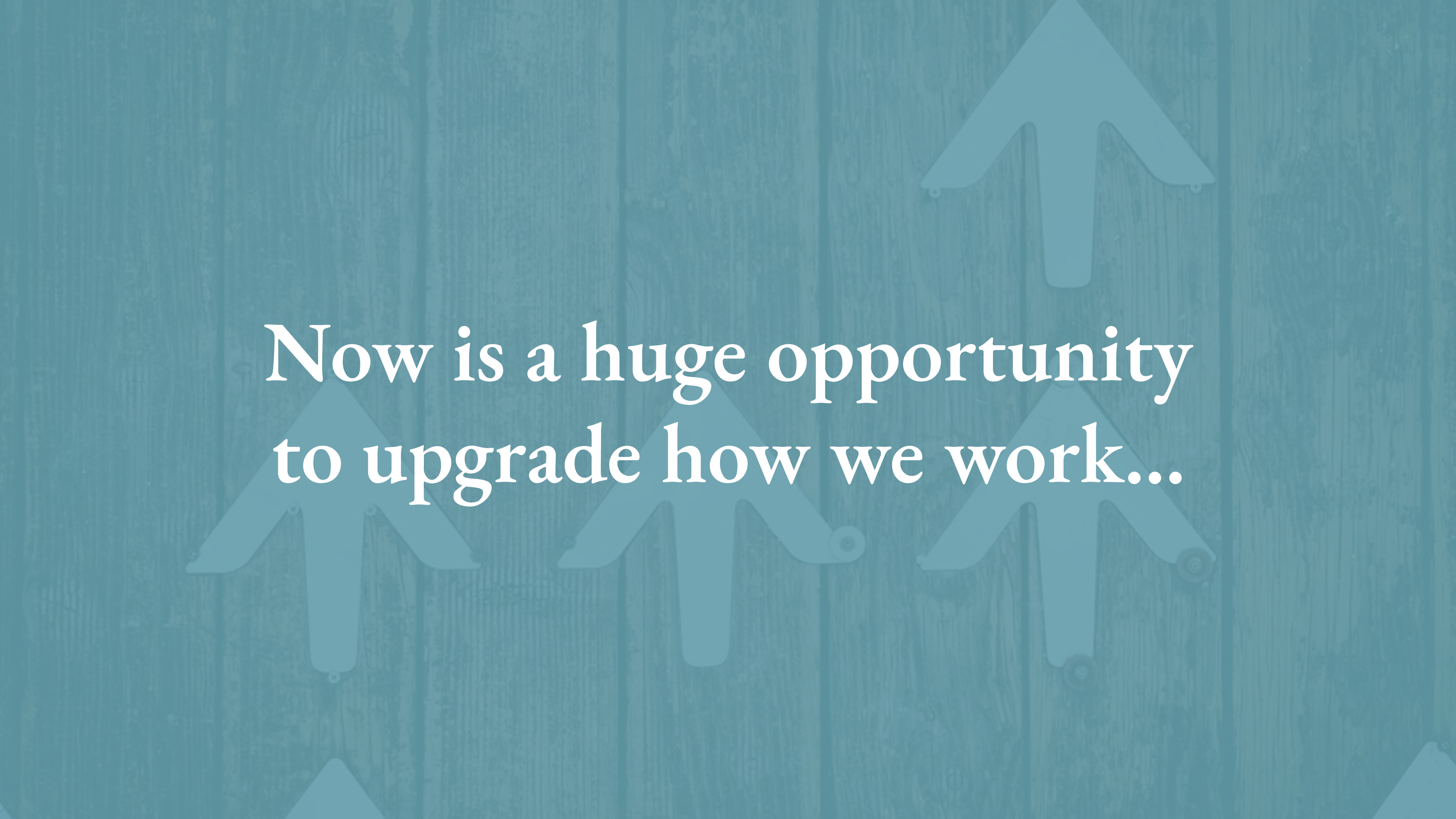
1. Set MITs at start of the day

IF YOU WANT TO BE 25+% MORE PRODUCTIVE

1. **Set MITs at start of the day**
2. **Clean up digital hygiene**

IF YOU WANT TO BE 25+% MORE PRODUCTIVE

1. Set MITs at start of the day
2. Clean up digital hygiene
3. Focus Sprints (3/week)



Now is a huge opportunity to upgrade how we work...

Get additional Becoming Superhuman insights!

bit.ly/wfh-superhuman
Code: “gobears”

syousef@berkeley.edu