

# FIRED UP & FOCUSED

Hey there, Rachel Cook here, host of the Promote Yourself to CEO podcast and founder of the CEO Collective. Welcome to day four of the Fired Up and Focused Challenge. Today I want to shift gears just a little bit and talk about setting up your work day for success. One of the things I hear over and over again is that we all have these crazy schedules. We have a lot in our life and in our business going on that is constantly demanding our attention. And it can be really hard to make sure that you are sitting down, getting 100% focused and actually able to stay focused and not get pulled into a million other directions. But for those of us who are entrepreneurs, who are ready to make that move from stressed out solopreneur to confident CEO, we need to be able to create the space we need to do our highest, best level work.

So today I want to share with you a technique that will help you to create that sacred space wherever you are, so that you can quickly get into your highest level of working. Even if you're working from home, if you are working at an office, doesn't matter if you're on the road or if you are where you normally like to work. Even if you only have half an hour, this practice will help you to get into that zone much faster. First, I want to talk about yoga. So there's something magical when you go into a studio for a yoga practice, the moment you step through the yoga studio doors, your body starts to have this physiological response. Your breath starts to deepen, your shoulders start to fall back and down, your chest expands. And it almost feels like your entire body is feeling this big sigh.

It feels grounded again. And it's quite amazing what happens when you go through something as simple as stepping through the doorway of your favorite yoga studio. But the truth is the magic that happens in the yoga studio doesn't require the studio in order to have that happen. These rituals, these routines are what create the sacred space. People often think it's the studio walls themselves create that special container, but that's not true. The truth is it's the rituals. It's the routines. It's the habits. It's the things that you're doing leading up to the practice and wrapping up the practice that create this sacred container where you are practicing yoga. So let's look at this practice through this lens. I'm going to break it down. So there's three stages we go through in a yoga practice. There's three different parts to create this full cycle. First is the opening stage.

For many yoga practitioners. We start with a round of om. We might start with a guided meditation or with a sun salutation. Then we go into the core practice itself. And finally, when we're ready to ease out of the practice and transition into our regular life, we have Savasana. So we actually have dedicated time to integrate. This might be quiet. This might be a guided meditation. This might be another round of om together as a class, but this is the clear process that most yoga practices go through in a studio to create this sense of calm and groundedness.

So the key to all of this, why I'm sharing this yoga nerd little piece with you is because people come out of yoga feeling transformed. They feel like they got in tune with themselves and with their body. And you don't need yoga to also have that type of feeling, to feel like you enter a space and get into the zone.

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What you need is a habit. So when you start a yoga practice, what starts to happen physiologically is once you step into that space, your brain knows it's time to be quiet. The chatter starts to calm down. It's like this Pavlovian response, you're training your brain, that this is a place where we come to be quiet. You stop asking why. You're training your brain to really just be present and listen for the next instruction. You start the ritual and you feel complete at the end because you have this whole process that brings the practice together. So what's really important is when you wrap up, you have that feeling of completion, which then makes it easy to transition into the next step. I think this is something a lot of people miss out on when it comes to creating routines in other areas of their life.

And I started looking at the role of ritual. When I first read the Creative Habit by Twyla Tharp. Now this is one of my favorite books of all time. I highly, highly, highly recommend it. She is a famous choreographer and dancer who has just been prolific. She has produced an incredible body of work. In her book, the Creative Habit. She talks about the power of these rituals and routines and just getting started. So an example is for her, a ritual that kicks off her day is waking up at 5:30 in the morning, getting into the cab and going to the gym for her two hour workout. It's not the two hour workout that starts her day. It's the getting into the cab. She realized that once she gets in the cab, that is the trigger that puts her on this path of completing this process.

She doesn't even have to question it. She's on this path of predictable actions that will get to where she ultimately wants to go. Once I started looking at how prolific creative people like Twyla Tharp, or Steven Pressfield, who wrote the War of Art. When I started looking at how they all approach their work as creatives, I realize that many creative people are doing this type of process that the rest of us don't really know. They have created these tiny seemingly meaningless little rituals, these little routines, these little habits that they do every day without fail, that helps them to get into that creative mental state very, very quickly without hemming and hawing or procrastinating or struggling with themselves about it. We can do the same thing with our work, with our practice of work, we can put ourselves in the zone. And again like the yoga practice, there are three key stages to this.

That we really want to think about this. And when we have a process in place, then we can sit down, jump right in and not feel like we're pulled in a million directions. Let's look at the three stages of work. Just like the yoga routine there's preparation. There's the first little bit that gets you into the work. Then there's the core work itself. And then finally there's closing it out so that you can transition into the next step. Once we can create this flow for ourselves, it'll allow us to do our best work without having to build up to it. Without punishing ourselves for not being on top of things all the time, this is incredibly powerful. So I want to share with you some of my own little rituals, my little habits, and break these down so that you can find a small ritual that will work for you.

For me, the day begins when it is time for me right now, my kids aren't at school. As many of yours may not be, my day begins when I decide to get ready for work. So I get ready for work and I brew my fresh pot of coffee, or tea. And I tell my kids, "Hey, mommy's getting ready to go for work." Right now I've actually chosen to work in an office space outside of my home because I have three small children. So I have this beautiful thing called a commute, I never had one in the last 12 years of working for myself. I've always been at home. But I have

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found that the commute serves as a trigger for me. Once I get in the car and get down towards the office, I'm instantly in the zone and ready to work well.

Prior to that, I had to create some rituals so that my brain would know it's time for me to get to work. So I would close the door to my office. This was huge. If you don't have an office space with a closable door, I highly recommend getting a door. I actually had my husband put a door up in my home office so that I could have a closable door. But if you do not have one right now, try work in a space where you can close the door because that signals to everyone else that it is work time for you. I always love to sit down and take a minute, get grounded, light a candle. It is something really small, but it is truly just me making, again, the space enjoyable for myself.

I love putting on my noise-canceling headphones, especially when I was working at home. That was another trigger for me. It's time to get to work. Even if I was just listening to ambient noise and not music, it was a huge trigger for me to get into that work zone. And then I open my must do tomorrow list. So we'll talk about the must do tomorrow list in just a moment. Now, once I do all those steps, then I'm really ready. I've put myself in the zone. My body knows it's time to get to work. My mind knows it's time to get to work. I've done these little habits that really help set the space for me. Then I can dive right into whatever's on my must do tomorrow list. We'll talk about that in just a second, but I also want to talk about how we wrap the day. Because this is just as important. We have to wrap the day or else we find ourselves feeling like we're living at work because we're constantly thinking... The mind is always churning about the other things we have to do.

So we have to have a closing ritual as well. So I close out my Workday by writing down my must do tomorrow list. This is an incredibly important part of this whole process, because it's all about writing down the top things that I need to do. Now, this is something I've been doing for 15 years now. It's something I learned when I was in a more traditional business consulting role. And I realized that people around me were getting things done faster every day because they weren't wasting an hour every morning, shuffling papers, trying to figure out what to do. They didn't have to question anything. They just knew when they got to work with their highest priority was. This comes from the story from Charles Schwab, who was a steel tycoon back in the early 1900s.

He hired a consultant named Ivy Lee who offered to increase the productivity of Schwab's people. So he decided I'll let Schwab decide what the results are worth. Schwab said, "Sure, go ahead." So Lee taught each executive at the steel company to sit down at the end of the day and create a list. It only can contain the six most important tasks to be completed the next day. Each morning, they start the day by working on the first item on that list and not moving on until it was completed. After a few months of seeing the results, Schwab sent a check to this consultant, Ivy Lee for \$25,000. That's about half a million dollars today. Probably a little more. So this simple practice is what allows my closing of my Workday to really transition into the rest of my day, because I'm putting it down. These are the things I've got to get done tomorrow. Then once I've made that list, I take off my headphones. I blow out my candle.

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I open my office door and I transition back into my regular life. Now, like I said, the must do tomorrow list is super important. It's one of the most important parts of my starting and stopping parts of my daily routine here. The most important thing I want you to think about is at the end of each day, you write down the most important tasks to do tomorrow. Now this is key. These aren't the most urgent tasks. These are the most important tasks. This is such a huge differentiator. Remember important are the things that are ultimately going to move your business forward. They're going to be usually revenue generating tasks. They're going to be the higher level things that need to get done. They're not going to be things like shuffling around emails in the inbox or any admin, ops, customer service, higher level.

The other thing here to make sure you're putting on your must do tomorrow list is that these are not projects. These are check off bubble tasks. Each project has numerous steps to get through. And if you are writing projects down on your to do list, you're probably feeling very frustrated that you're not getting forward motion because they take a long, long, long time to do. There's many, many steps into that project. So we want to actually break it down as much as you can, and that will help you one mentally and emotionally feel like you're making progress. But two, it becomes more manageable because you've broken those projects down into checkoff-able, manageable, checklist-able tasks.

Okay, the next morning you want to start with task number one and don't move on until it is completed. This is where those Pomodoros from yesterday will come in really, really handy. Because you can sit down for 25 minutes, work solely on that first priority on your must do tomorrow list, and then take a break.

If you're not finished by then you just keep going with the next round of Pomodoros. If it's not finished, you add it to the next day's must do tomorrow list. That's one reason why we really keep it limited to six tasks. Actually six is too much for me. I limit mine to three because I don't work eight hours a day. I work max four or five. So I really limit my own list to three things that I need to focus on every day. And that really helps me feel like I'm being productive. I'm focusing on the most important things in my business, and I have clear progress. These are all checkoff-able tasks that are me towards my bigger goals.

So take action. I want you to go download the workbook for today. Set up your daily success practice. Think about what you're going to do to set up your workday, to start your workday, to signal to yourself, signal to your family, signal to everyone around you that, "Hey, I am in work mode right now."

And then how are you going to wrap up your day? This is going to be so crucially important. If you are starting to feel like you are living at work, which is how it feels when your brain is always thinking about work stuff. When you're constantly checking your phone, even though you're supposed to be in family time, if you feel like you're living at work, we need to start putting these practices in place because it will help create a little bit of separation. And that separation is what will help us to avoid burnout. We have to create those boundaries between work and life. And start using the must do tomorrow list. Okay, let me know how this goes. Pop over onto my Facebook page and let me know your insights, your ah ha's. I can't wait to hear how this goes for you. Okay, I'll see you tomorrow.

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