**FOCUS LIKE A LASER\_2 ESSENTIAL STEPS TO MASTER YOUR FOCUS**

**Female speaker:** When I grow up, I want to be a DJ.

**Male speaker:** Welcome to the Chalene Show. Chalene has helped thousands with her books, seminars, and online academies. She’s the author of The New York Times best-selling book, *Push*, and a mother of two. Your host once thought she would be a nightclub DJ [makes noise].

**Chalene Johnson**: Nightclub DJ. That’s right, ladies and gentlemen, you’re listening to 98.7 on your FM dial. It just seemed like such a cool thing to be a nightclub DJ. Instead, I ended up working at a record store in the mall. Close, but not exactly. I had no idea I would end up in fitness. But it has always been my goal to help people become strong, strong. And today, that’s what we’re going to talk about – strength. But not your physical strength, your mental strength, your character, your toughness, that edge that makes you feel like you can do anything.

For all the years, all the hours, all the videos, all of the lectures, all of the seminars, all the appearances that I’ve done to help people improve their physical strength, I believe there’s nothing more important for any of us to work on than our inner strength. This show is all about being better, getting results, being as effective as you possibly can, how to really use your time the best way possible so you actually have more time, the time that you need to actually live a life, the life that you deserve, the life that you desire.

It’s about learning new habits. It’s not just learning the habits and understanding them, it’s learning how to implement them, because when you implement those habits, your life changes.

And today’s show is all focused on focus, the habits that allow you to focus like a laser beam. So if you’d like the outline so that you can take your own handwritten notes or digital notes, if you’d like, you can follow along and keep the podcast playing at the same time. You just press the home button and that should take you back to the screen where you can see your text messaging app, right? So open up your app for text messaging and enter the following number, 949-565-4337. And then in the body of the text, just type the word “laser”, L-A-S-E-R, and then just hit send. In just a few moments, you will have a text message that explains and provides you the entire outline for this episode as well as the one prior to this one.

Now, today’s episode is all about how specifically to build a fortress around your focus. Researchers show that by building this type of fortress around your focus, the average person can get done in 2.7 hours what it normally takes us 8 to 9 hours to accomplish. If you really would like to, and I strongly encourage this, understand why our brains work this way, I urge you to listen to the episode prior to this one. And here’s why.

When we understand why we have to do things a certain way as opposed to just like following rules, it really helps us to go, “Okay, I can make a decision on whether or not I want to do this or not.” And I think when you understand the neuroscience, what’s happening in your brain which requires us to do the things I’m going to recommend in this episode, it’s just going to make it that much easier. You’re going to feel compelled. You’re going to feel motivated to want to do these things.

So the episode prior to this one is all about what’s going on in our brains and why it’s so critical we do these things. This episode is all about building those habits.

Here’s the deal. Focus really boils down to two things: minimizing distractions and maximizing that creative, that energy that you have in your brain that allows you to really do the most important task and to focus on it. So it’s two things. It’s your brain and it’s your environment, two very simple things.

The first is eliminate distractions. Why do I need to eliminate distractions? I like the TV on in the background. I don’t mind having my phone nearby in case someone sends me a text message. But now that I’ve really become a student of neuroscience and understanding why this is important, I am so crazy motivated to stick to these habits. And that’s just another not so subtle plug for the episode prior to this one. It’s really all about what’s going on in your head. And if you’re like me, it’s going to convince you, it’s going to motivate you to make these changes.

But here’s the reason why you want to minimize stimulus or eliminate distractions around you. All of those distractions require our brain to make a decision. In other words, and you’ve done this before where you’re working on a paper or you’re writing a blog or you’re focused on something, yet there’s a television playing in the background. And then suddenly, there’s something on TV. Maybe it’s a car chase or it’s a guest on a television program and you suddenly look up and start paying attention to the TV show.

Your brain is always hearing that information. It wasn’t like suddenly someone tapped you on the shoulder and said, “Hey, now pay attention to the TV that’s been on the background.” Your brain is scanning that information the entire time. So your brain is constantly making these micro decisions on “Should I keep working on what I’m working on or should I break and pay attention to the TV?”

The same is true for absolutely everything that we can see or hear. Our brain in the background is going through this process of “Should I pay attention to this? Is this dangerous? Is this interesting? Is this something I should look at? Should I continue doing what I’m doing or respond to this?” So if each one of those decisions distracts us, that’s one thing. But the second thing that’s really important to know is that each one of those micro decisions also takes away brain power. Whether big or small, each decision requires our brain to use glucose as an energy source to make that decision.

So one of the best ways that you can become focused is by protecting your brain from having to make all of these decisions. And I’ve heard many people say, “Well, I just put my phone on do not disturb and I set it off to the side.” And I think that’s great. That sounds like a wonderful way to ease yourself into this program. I’m going to recommend that if you have something you really need to focus on, which like for me, right now, is this podcast, put your phone on airplane mode. Or if you’re really bold, you’ll actually put it in another room.

The simple sound of a text message stimulates an area of our brain that used to be responsible for scanning for danger. Our brain, no matter what we’re doing, if we hear a ding on a phone or a baby crying or a siren in the background, no matter what we’re doing, our brains come to full attention. Our brain is always scanning sound, scanning stimuli, and trying to decide, “Is there anything I need to respond to right now?”

And so by just feeling your phone vibrate or seeing it flash or knowing that you’re getting a notification, by just seeing that notification in the upper corner of your laptop that you’ve received an inbox to your mail, those things distract you. And in that moment, no matter what you’re working on, you have to make a split decision. Do I need to pay attention to this or should I continue? So let’s just start with your phone. If you can handle it, put it in the other room. Getting a little stronger? Put it on the airplane mode. Just getting used to this idea? Put your phone on “do not disturb”.

Next is your environment. And this is so important. What types of things distract us? Well, children, obviously. They’re terribly distracting little creatures. Yes, they are. So rather than trying to, especially those of you who are trying to build your business while your kids are young from home, here’s something I recommend and this works so much better than trying to do 10 minutes here and 10 minutes there and 20 minutes here and 50 minutes there.

Instead of doing that which makes you feel like you’re working all day long, not to mention the fact that you start to become resentful of all the distractions.

**Female speaker:** Mom, my tummy hurts.

**Chalene Johnson**: What a shame to have to feel like your kids are a distraction. It shouldn’t be that way. I recommend rather than trying to work all day long, just set a 45-minute period, which I’m going to talk to you about in just a moment, where the kids aren’t even awake, either they’re sleeping or yeah, you wake up before they get up or you schedule yourself a one hour power hour while you have grandma with the kids or a babysitter or they’re taking a nap.

But instead of trying to do it all, all day long, pick one very specific time where you can focus and you don’t have to worry about distraction or interaction or someone who needs your attention because --

**Female speaker:** Uh-oh, what if Mom finds out?

**Chalene Johnson**: Quite frankly, there are times of the day where people, they just they need to ask you questions or you need to be present and you want to be present. Now, we know that kids sometimes demand our attention and that’s why we’re their parents. And we’re obligated to take care of them.

There are also times when you’re at the office or when you’re in an environment with adults and you really need to concentrate. And if you’re like me, you’re very distracted by having other people nearby, not because they’ve asked for my attention, but because I’m just distracted. If there’s people in the room, I want to tell them a story, I want to make them laugh, I want to ask them, where did you get that shirt? What are you working on? What’s going on in your life? Like if there are people nearby, I want to talk to them. I’m curious.

I can’t hear a conversation softly in the distance and focus on what I’m reading. I don’t know if you can. But most of us cannot. And that’s why having people around us hearing other conversations, even though you are essentially blocking out that conversation, your brain is still having to make the decision on whether or not to block out that conversation. And there are still even pieces of it that you’re hearing and your brain is processing that.

Like think about as time where you’ve heard a conversation in the background, you’re intently working on something and then you mistakenly think you’ve heard your name. Your brain hears your name, it immediately stops and says, “Oh, did you need me?” Or if nothing else, you’re just going to stop and listen to see if that conversation pertains to you.

So if there’s conversations, if there are people, that is distracting. That distraction requires a decision. That decision-making process forces you to toggle back and forth between your tasks. The brain cannot and does not multitask. The brain can shift back and forth between tasks, but it’s so much slower to do that than it is to just focus on one thing and do it well. People are distracting. Kids are distracting. Pets are distracting. Yes, especially if you have a difficult time paying attention. Even a barking dog off in the distance can be extremely distracting.

So Chalene, are you saying I’ve got to put up my kids for adoption? Put a sign on the door that says, “Do not come in”? and take my pets down to the local shelter? No, I’m not saying that. I just want you to be aware why sometimes at the end of the day, your brain hurts and you feel so fatigued and you’re like, “Well, I don’t know why I’m so tired or why I can’t focus or why I got so little done today.”

So if you can take certain steps to make sure you can’t hear the animals – like we used to have an African grey. I love animals. I mean if it were up to me, we would have a farm here. I would definitely want an alpaca. I probably like to raise my own goats. I definitely would have more than the four dogs that we have now.

We once had birds and bunnies, yes, an African grey as a matter of fact. They are the smartest birds in the world. And this African grey, named Buster, learned to make every single sound except for what we were trying to teach him, right? Like I had all these phrases that were pretty funny, I would try to teach him. No, he didn’t learn one of them.

He learned to imitate the sound of the doorbell. He learned to imitate the sound of a new email like, “You’ve got mail.” He learned to imitate the dog barking. He learned to imitate the door slamming. Like every single distracting sound in the entire universe, Buster learned to imitate it. And especially sounds like you would normally go, “Oh, better jump up, someone’s at the door.”

And so we kept moving him around our house to different areas where I couldn’t hear him when I was working because it was so incredibly distracting.

Meanwhile, I’m the only person in the Johnson household who actually loved Buster. Everybody else was like boycotting to get rid of Buster. Well, African greys live forever and ever and ever and ever.

So eventually, I can’t remember what it was, but – oh, I know what it was. It was to remodel one of our rooms. And Bret said, “Listen, I’ll make you a deal. You find Buster a really nice home and we can remodel this room.” I’m like, “Okay, deal.” Because the poor guy wasn’t getting attention. So we found this wonderful woman who loves birds and Buster is now her BFF.

My point is, the sound of your animals can be very distracting. You might not have the option of putting them in another area of your home but you can certainly use noise cancelling headphones or pay attention to the fact that they’re really loud of that you can hear them and do take special precautions so that they’re not being noisy or loud during that time when you really need to focus.

So you’re starting to get the idea that anything you can hear becomes a distraction. And that’s not just pets, people, kids. That’s also television, that’s music playing in the background, that’s loud traffic. It’s just about anything except white noise.

For example, it’s very popular now for many startups and entrepreneurs to work in what are called co-op offices where there’s many cubicles or even a giant open place to work. I think that’s a fantastic idea if you love to bounce creative ideas off of other people.

I would say this, however, don’t expect to do your very best most focused work in an open work environment. If there’s all kinds of creative people having creative conversations around you, good luck trying to block that out. It’s going to be virtually impossible. If nothing else, schedule several days a week where you can focus without any distraction.

So what kind of things can be visual distractions? Well, if you work in an all glass office and you’re constantly seeing people walk by and, you know, you’re just a people watcher, it’s pretty tough to do your work. I wouldn’t suggest if you love watching people, go into the mall or go into Target and please don’t go to Walmart and try to get any work done because that is the best people-watching on the planet. I don’t care what city you’re in. And if you’re listening to this from some place outside of the United States and you come to visit, you must go to Walmart. Best people-watching in the world. That’s not the place where you want to work.

I see a lot of people camp out at Starbucks, and the same thing, I think to myself, “How are they getting any work done?” Because I see them keep looking up and they’re hearing people placing their orders and they’re hearing conversations. I just can’t imagine that is a very good place to work.

The library, on the other hand, not bad. It doesn’t have to be that visually stimulating. Libraries are certainly less and less frequented by the public these days, so you can always find a quiet little area to sit down, put your nose down, and get focused.

So what do you do if you’re a manager, if people are constantly knocking on your door, asking questions, or you’re the person that everybody comes to for direction? Well, you just have to decide how much of that is your own doing and how much of it can you change. People love to be empowered. People feel good about themselves when we say to them, “Hey, you know the answer to this. I trust your judgment. You can’t mess up. You know, tell me what your choices are and then just make a decision.”

Like when we empower people to make decisions, it’s funny how they start doing that. When I first started realizing that I wanted to create SMART Success for my own life, the first thing I had to do was figure out how to be more effective with my time. That meant I wanted to spend fewer days, fewer hours working each and every week. It became immediately clear to me that when I was going into our office at Powder Blue Productions where we had lots of very interesting fun-to-look-at, fun-to-talk-to employees, I was getting virtually nothing done. And on those times when I did basically walk into my office and close the door and tried to get work done, someone was always there with a question or something that they needed attended to.

I started staying home and making myself unavailable for questions during certain hours of the day. And what I found was people figure out the answers when you’re not there to give them the answer. The more you train your staff and your key people and empower them, the more capable they will be of making decisions without you.

And the same is true of your kids, too, man. If you’re making every decision for your kids, if you’re telling them what to wear and what sports they’re going to play and who their friends should be and what clothes they should wear to school, all you’re doing is teaching them that they are not smart enough or clever enough or bright enough to figure this stuff out for themselves. What you’re raising are people who will be paralyzed by self-doubt. Let your kids fail. You can tell them, “Here’s what happens if you choose A, B, or C. Here are the consequences and I know you’ll make a wise decision. If you don’t, that’s okay. You can clean it up and you’ll fix it later.”

I mean, that’s the one thing I have to say – Marge and Bill, mom and dad, love you, you always did that for us. And I did some really dumb things but you always told me, “All right, here’s what could happen if you did this really dumb thing. We hope you don’t do that. Here’s the better thing to do in our opinion, but the choice is yours.” And because they empowered me with that, yeah, I did make some mistakes but I always felt so totally confident to go for it, like I believed in myself. I don’t have self-doubt.

So, empower your employees, empower your children, empower the people around you to make these decisions because if you’re making decisions for everybody else and yourself, no wonder you can’t focus.

When I was writing my book, *Push*, and I really had to put this into play. At about 11 AM each day, I composed a standard text message. I kept a copy of it in my notes. And then at 11 AM each day before I was about to start my concentrated work hours, I would send that text message to all the people who normally would want to reach out to me in a daily basis. So I didn’t have to send it to all of my contacts, but my manager and a couple of key people at work, my mom, my dad, brothers, sisters – best friend, sister, I don’t have two of them, sister – sister, brother, mom and dad, and a few friends who basically I would talk to every day.

And for those first couple of weeks, I would just send this text message every single day. And I would say, “Hey, guys. This is a group text. This is just a reminder that I will be putting my phone on airplane mode now. If there is an emergency, please contact my husband – I would give them the phone number – or call my house phone.” Because, like, the house phone never rings, right? No one calls your house phone anymore. That text message went on to say, “Thank you so much for helping me to honor this time. This allows me to focus intently on one thing and one thing only. And that is, writing my book.”

That simple text message did a couple of things. It relieved me of that guilty feeling I had when I did put my phone on airplane mode, like, “Oh no, people are going to think I’m ignoring them.” Or when I take it off of airplane mode, if there’s 50 text messages, I’ll have to explain to each one of them why I didn’t respond quickly.

And then secondly, what it did is it enlisted the love and support of the people who meant the most to me. Not just their love and support, but their accountability. At the beginning of this program, I shared with you that there’s really two ways to focus. The first of which is to eliminate or minimize distractions. And the second is to really get in touch with when your brain is at its peak when you’re able to focus your best. Now for each person, that’s different.

In the next episode of the Chalene Show, I will teach you how to identify what time of the day is optimal for you personally to focus; how to get and stay in, what neuroscientist call, our central executive mode; a couple of quick tricks for clearing that brain fog and what to do if you’re just not feeling creative or in the mood to work; how to rearrange your personal schedule to get done in one hour what most people take four to five hours to accomplish.

In my next episode, I will also cover the best ways to get your mental mojo back, how to have your best most focused week of all. And I’m going to weigh in on some rather controversial brain enhancing or smart drugs and supplements that many people are relying on to get what is referred to as brain gain.

Again, to get the outline for this show, send me a text message. That number is 949-565-4337 and just send me the word laser, as in laser focus.

For those outside of the United States, please visit my website. It’s chalene.com/podcast. And as always, that’s where you’re able to leave me a personal message about this show, any previous show or anything you like you hear on an upcoming show.

I’d like to thank you for listening. And thank you for your continued support of Courageous Confidence. The Chalene Show is brought to you by the Courageous Confidence Club. Confidence is a strength that can be built and strengthened just like any muscle. Your success, your likeability, your influence are all determined by your confidence. It’s the number one factor in determining your professional success, your happiness in relationships and your ability to raise self-sufficient children.

To feel more confident in social settings, this is my life coaching program and it’s changing lives. I hope you will check it out. Go to courageousconfidenceclub.com.

**Katie**: Hi Chalene. My name is Katie. I’m listening to your podcasts on the Chalene Show. And I’ve actually been one of your SMART Success students this year. And I’m in Tiffany’s accountability group, which is as you know, awesome.

But I had to call and say thank you after listening to your last recent podcast where I felt like you’re speaking directly to me and then the one with Bo Eason where I felt as though he was speaking directly to me.

I want to be a writer someday and it can appear challenging. You’ve encouraged me to not give up on that. But the story that’s been coming out recently is not one that I wanted to tell. The story that I have felt this strange burning intensity to tell is not something that I want to talk about. I don’t like talking about it. And not that everybody is owed my life story, you know. But I really go to out of my way to not talk about it. Just recently, that’s when the story that I’ve been needing to tell is about going through that process and coming out of it okay and dealing with depression and the shame that comes with this from society. And this just burning desire to get people hope, but I can’t do that without telling my own story. And here I am so scared to death and ashamed of telling it.

And listening to your podcast with Bo Eason and then the one about the motivational tips, I was just in tears going, “First of all, there’s no reason for me to have that shame. And second, this could change the world. This could change other people. This could ease someone’s pain. This could give someone hope if I come forward and be honest about it.”

And here I am in this great accountability group and it’s time to let go of that shame and that fear of telling my story and being who I really am. It’s time to be that person and, you know, maybe I can inspire other people at the same time. Thank you. Thank you so much, Chalene.

**[END OF RECORDING]**