**CS How to Organize Your Brain**

**Chalene:** Yo, did you missed me? I missed you.

Hey, I’m all pumped up and I’m really excited to share this with you. I just returned from our Smart Success Seminar. It’s a seminar we do here in Southern California. Anyways, I just got back from Smart Success and I was having this great conversation with my friend, Mel Abraham and he was telling me this thing that he does on his show that’s super helpful.

And I thought, that kind of reminds me about this thing that they do at my church that I really love and when you walk in the doors at Saddleback Church, they give you this (I don’t know what you call it) but it’s like, I think of it as my outline.

All I know is it keeps me super focused on the message and I always write notes all over the thing. I was having this like brainstorming ideas of how this relates to other areas of my life. The message always becomes much more profound and I become physically active in the message when I use this outline to take note.

Here’s what I want to do today. I want you to be able to go through an outline with this episode because I can’t think of anything more important than teaching people how to have laser like focus.

Now, you don’t have to pause this podcast. I’m going to walk you through this, just trust me, trust me.

Now if you’re listening to this on your phone, this is going to make total sense if you’re listening to it from your desktop. You’ll pull out your phone and follow along with us.

Okay, so again, you don’t have to hit pause. All you’re going to do is hit the home screen. Now, I don’t know where that is on a fancy Android, but on an iPhone, it’s that little circle at the very bottom and if you double tap it, it should take you back to your home screen.

Okay, so you’re already back at your home screen and look at this, you can still hear me. How cool?

Now, continue to trust me. Open up your text messages, okay? See, you can still hear me. Everything’s good. Now you’re going to send me a text message. Here’s the number. Are you ready? 949-656-4337. Again, 949-565-4337. So you just enter that number just like any other cellphone number into the field where you would normally pull up your contacts.

Just enter that number and then in the message that you send to me, just send the word, laser. It doesn’t need to be capitalized, no hashtags, just one word, laser.

As soon as you hit send, I will send you a reply text message. Now, what I like about this is normally, you’re listening to me from your phone or at least I assume most of you are listening to me from your phones. So when I say like, “Go check out the show notes or there’s this really cool download that you can find on my website.” I know that the likelihood of you remembering to do that later in the day is very low, number one, and number two, you really need it while you’re listening in that moment.

So, why not give it to you right now, on your phone? Let’s see if this works.

From your phone, you can open up your mail app. That’s where you’ll get the outline. I hope you’re excited about that. I’d love to hear how that goes for you and do you like this?

I find it helps me to really make sense of the information and to truly stay engage, to stay focused. And today’s episode is all about just that, focus.

I hope that the reasons why we need to focus are obvious. We can just all agree that when we’re focused we get more done. We’re more effective, we’re more present. But this episode is really about how do you do that other than saying to yourself, “I’ve got to get focus. I’ve got to get focus.” And specifically, this episode is to help you understand what has happened to us. Here’s what I mean.

In my preparations for Smart Success, this year, I decided not just to teach my own systems and my own theories and then the theories of people who I’ve studied but to actually look at the science behind it, because it’s not just the collective group of people who have figured out that there’s a better way of doing things. There’s got to be some science behind this.

In my quest for that knowledge, I found the most amazing group of neuroscientists and researchers. My favorite of which is Daniel Levington. He’s the author of *The Organized Mind.*

What I love about him is he really just takes this perspective of looking at how technology has changed, how much information that’s thrown at us just keeps getting more and more robust. In fact, he shares in his book that since 1986, we now receive five times the amount of data than we did back then.

So what does that mean? Like for me, what does that mean, how much? What is that? That is the equivalent, my friends, of reading seven newspapers, cover to cover every day. Well, no wonder you can’t remember your kids names, let alone where you put your keys.

Our brains can only handle so much. It’s just like a computer, once you keep adding file upon file, upon file to the hard drive, eventually, the computer just doesn’t know what to do with it and it kind of goes haywire.

We’ve all had that experience where you haven’t upgraded soon enough and suddenly, your computer starts freezing and shutting down or just keeps spinning like going around in circles, wasting time.

Well, essentially, that’s what we’re doing because there’s so much information that our brains are presented with, each and every day. Now, of course, there are many, many positives to all the information that’s available to us, including the fact that I could just find all these information without having to go to my public library.

I was able to research neuroscientists and researchers who study the brain by simply going to Google. All of that data is there where in the past, I would have to take a trip down to the local library and sat down for several days to do my research.

Now, all of the data is available to us. The negative side to that is, our brains aren’t very well equipped at handling all that extra data and knowing what to do with it. So in general, and here’s what we’re going to get to in this episode – is once you understand that we’re not equipped to do this and it’s not good for us and we’re less effective when we try to manage all that information, once you understand the science behind that, it’s going to make it much easier for you and more rewarding for you to setup a system where you are able to focus.

We’ve put these external pressures on ourselves that we’re supposed to like, multitask and be able to handle everything. And you’re supposed to be able to drive down the road with earbud in your ear in case you get a phone call and the kids are in the back seats watching movies on the headrest of your vehicle. And then there’s a kid in the front seat who’s just playing their own radio station and then there’s cars driving by and there’s lights, and there’s sirens and there’s all these information. And then on top of that, you’ve got all of these things that are going through your brain. You got to keep track of for that day and what time you’re going to make the kids dinner and where do we have to go after this? And what was I supposed to do today? What time do I have to pick up Charlie? Was I supposed to pick up the dry cleaning or do I have to get home fast?

All of these things are going through our brain. Meanwhile, at the same time, we’re trying to process all of that external sound, right? Like, you can hear the movies in the background, you can hear the kids. All of these things going through our brains have I stressed you out yet? [Laughs]

Well, the reason why we feel so stressed is because we haven’t evolved – our brains haven’t evolved to be able to handle this. Our technology has evolved far faster than our brains ability to handle all these information.

In fact, from a neuroscience standpoint, multi-tasking is impossible. It doesn’t even exist. What multi-tasking really is, is toggling. It’s switching back and forth between tasks or thoughts or responsibilities or projects, but none of us are truly doing two things at once.

Now, you might be listening and driving at the same time, but when you’re really having to focus and actively think and do two things at the same time, we are toggling back and forth between those two activities, which by the way, I think that’s all the more reason why you should just sit quietly and fill out your outline as you go through this podcast as opposed to trying to do 18 other things at the same time.

I mean, how often have you been watching a YouTube video and at the same time you start to slowly download, you decide to open up another tab and then do some shopping and then you realize that that video has already downloaded and started playing the video after that. And now you still have items in your shopping cart. We just do this toggling back and forth and back and forth. Meanwhile, you weren’t supposed to be looking at YouTube or shopping. You were supposed to be getting something done.

So what Daniel Levington argues is that, people really have to accept the fact that we are in this day and age of information overload and it’s too much on our brain.

And the reason why certain people in society have found a way to be very successful is because they’ve found a way to kind of organize that information and keep it at bay. In other words, they found a way to focus like a laser and to almost on blinders or protection mechanism so they don’t even have to process that information because whether you’re dealing with it or not, whether you realize it consciously, all of that information, you have to make a decision. Do I take this in? Do I remember this? Do I listen to this? Do I pay attention? And that is very taxing on our brains.

You see, primitive man really only had four things, he/she had to keep track of, food, shelter, urgency or danger or something that was right now had to be handled and lastly, procreation.

I don’t think we need any further studies to know that primitive man still really worries about these four things, especially that last one. But on top of that, 595 bazillion other things including passwords and calendars and cellphones and instant messages and emails and ATM pin codes and social media handles, and email addresses and names of people that we are supposed to know in real life and then the names who supposedly we know in social media and information coming to us in all angles; billboards and radio and TV and our phones and retargeting ads on websites.

We have to make all these split second seemingly urgent decisions all day. Do I continue making eye contact with this individual listening to them intently and ignoring the fact that my phone is vibrating in my purse? Should I assume that this is an emergency or is it better that I just continue to pay attention? Do I reply to this email now or should I continue composing the one that I was writing? Should I continue researching or should I now pay attention to the photo of the shoes that’s so weird? I was just looking at those shoes on Zappos. So like, why are they suddenly on my sidebar on this research site?

I know, yeah, what time is it, and what time is my next appointment and oh my God, I just forgot, I have children and they need to be picked up in 15 minutes. Like, there’s just so much. Back in the day all we had to figure out, food, shelter, danger or urgency, and procreation.

Well, now, all of that information feels like a dangerous urgent situation like, think about it, when your phone dings it sends off this feeling in us. I mean, right or wrong, it just happens like you feel like, “What if it’s an emergency?” What if I need to reply to this? I can’t ignore it. I can’t ignore it. What if I shouldn’t, what if it’s urgent. And that happens because one time, just once, I couldn’t reach you and it actually was an emergency. So now, we’ve been conditioned to feel like every time there’s a ding, every time there’s a notification, it’s urgent. And it’s placed us under so much stress. So much stress that it becomes almost impossible for us to focus.

So what do we do about it? Well, we understand that it is what it is and we have choice. We have the ability to create undistracted environment when we need to focus.

The first step is to do away with the notion that we actually can multi-task, because as we know from a scientific standpoint, we really can’t. We think we’re multi-tasking but scientist Earl Miller, a neuroscientist at MIT and one of the world’s experts on divided attention says that, “We actually can’t multi-task. When people think they’re multi-tasking, what’ they’re actually doing is just toggling back and forth between activities very quickly. And every time you do so, as he says, “There’s a cognitive cost in doing so.”

In other words, we’re not meant to do this. We’re not meant to keep several balls up in the air at the same time. In fact, multi-tasking has been found to increase your production of stress hormones.

At the Smart Success Seminar, I went to this exercise where I had everybody write down a phrase, just one phrase and then they copy that phrase down on one line. And then on the line below it, they wrote the numbers 1 through 23. 12345678 consecutively. And they copied the phrase which was, multi-tasking is messy. Then they wrote down those numbers consecutively.

On average, it took my audience about 12 seconds. Some as few as eight seconds to complete both lines. Then what I had them do was toggle between those two tasks. They would write a letter on the top line and then a corresponding number on the line below it. Same activities just switching back and forth between the two and just in that brief moment experimenting with my audience, it took almost everybody in the audience a minimum of 40 seconds to the same tasks which most people were able to complete within 8-10 seconds.

Our brains don’t like to go back and forth. In fact, I asked my audience how did that make you feel? And even though it was just an exercise, it was nothing very serious, even though the outcome didn’t really affect their lives, all of them noticed that it made them feel stressed out, that they were really just even disconnected from the phrase and the numbers, where as when they just wrote out the phrase and just wrote out the numbers, those two things made sense. But when they were going back and forth between the two of them, it felt very confusing and disjointed.

Think about how similar that is to just our whole day. So I don’t think you’d be surprised to find out that when we’re multi-tasking, our production of stress hormone cortisol, goes through the roof. And that’s our fight or flight hormone. Like when you’re really concentrating really hard on something and then your phone dings and then someone walks up and taps you on the shoulder and ask you a question and you want to lose it, “I’m really trying to concentrate, but you can’t and you just have to stay calm.”

Well, that moment, that adrenaline that you feel, that is cortisol, my friends. And multi-tasking creates a dopamine addiction feedback loop. So the brain starts feeling a reward for losing focus and constantly searching for external stimulation. You’ve done this before where you stand in an elevator and your phone doesn’t operate and you’re just stuck standing there with nothing to look at, no advertising, no music, no other person, you kind of don’t know what to do with yourselves. That’s because our brains have been conditioned to feel this adrenaline, this constant mental fog, this constant scrambling for something to process. It’s a Catch-22, it’s like we don’t like it, we don’t like the way it feels but yet it’s almost addictive.

It’s very hard for many of us not to be stimulated to just sit in a room without five things happening at once. Remember back in the day when we used to just relax by sitting down to watch TV and now we’re like, we’ll that would certainly be terribly unproductive. Let’s watch our TV and be on our iPad and our laptop and our cellphones.

It’s so hard for people to do just one thing. I mean, back in the day when your phone rings, if you’re busy, you just don’t answer it or you turn off the ringer, but now, because someone can leave you a message and say, “I’m terribly disappointed why you didn’t pick up, didn’t you get my message?” We don’t do that. In fact, we don’t even leave our phones wired to the wall anymore. Now we carry them with us everywhere.

I know so many people who sleep with their phone right next to their bed. This is a judgment matter, this is a matter of learning how you can focus like a laser when you need to.

So let’s talk about what’s happening in your brain.

In his book, *Organized Mind*, Daniel Levington introduces four components of our attention system. The first one is called mind wandering mode.

You want to kind of think of that as daydreaming or when something happens really serious or thought provoking and you just need to sit there and all of your thoughts are finding a place, like you’re making a sense of it.

And then, there’s central executive mode. You know when you’re in central executive and you felt this when you’re into something that’s like super interesting to you. There are no distractions. You’re flying through it. It’s super interesting. You’re being extremely effective and it feels really good. Someone has to almost tap you on the shoulder and you’re like, woohh… I’ve been riding for like 45 minutes.

And then there’s the what he calls, attentional filter. Now the attentional filter or switch moves us back and forth from one mode to the other but the attentional filter is that thing that’s going on where you can be in a noisy loud room and you can hear the ding of a phone, right? And you’re like, that’s something that needs my attention. And even though that might not be your phone, you still hear it or if you’re a new mom, you know this feeling when you’re in a very crowded environment, the first time you’re away from your baby and it’s as if you can hear your baby crying or if like there’s a child crying you’re like, huh, baby crying, is that for me? Or you can hear someone go, “Mom” and every mom sounds like it’s your kid, right?

It’s that same thing when you can be in a very busy important meeting at work and you hear sirens and your brain just knows to tune out the music, to tune out the vacuum cleaner but if it hears a siren, it should pay attention.

So what we’ve learned about highly successful people is that they are able to be full present in the moment and extremely effective because they have found a way to filter out all distractions. In fact they see this critical, critical to their success as their ability to concentrate on exactly what is at hand without worrying about everything else that might be less productive, less efficient or vying for your attention.

Now once we know there are brains working in these different ways, there’s a couple things I found really interesting in the book and the first of which is, when we feel overloaded, right? And we’re having a hard time concentrating, we feel stressed out, the first thing you have to do is give your brain energy.

We use glucose on a cellular level to make decisions. How do we make glucose? Well, there’s a couple different ways we produce that in the brain, the first of which is sugar. You got it. And we all know that sugar is not the way to go.

I mean, if you’re desperate and you’re about to take a big exam, and the only option you have is to do a shot of sugar, great, then I hope that you will pick a complex carbohydrate not a simple sugar. But we do know that sugar delivers that glucose to the brain to make decision.

A better way to deliver that energy system to the brain is, sleep. And I know your next question, does that mean a nap? Yes! That’s right. So I think you should probably walk into your boss’s office later this afternoon and say, “By the way, just so I’m really brilliant today, I will be taking a short nap right after lunch.”

If that’s not an option, you’ve got to make sure you’re getting adequate sleep, okay? And the third, I think the coolest way that our brain produces glucose and kind of recharges itself is through daydreaming. Just thinking and processing through.

Now when I read that in his book, I started to do some further research. What constitutes brain wandering or mind wandering or brain storming.

It’s really quite varied how you can accomplish this same feat, that would include, just sitting and thinking. Remember the kid who used to be reprimanded for looking out the window at what was happening outside while the teacher was teaching lesson. Well, that kid probably had tremendous brain power because when you allow your mind to wander, it improves glucose and our ability to make decisions.

Other things you can do are meditate, time in prayer, exercising by yourself without the stimulus of loud music and other people talking, etc. walking in nature.

These types of activities help our brains get into the mind wandering mode. So the two modes that we – I mean, we need all three modes.

So here’s what we to do to be super duper laser focused, we want to get into central executive mode and we want to be able to stay there for about 45 minutes to an hour. And then a break of about 15 minutes of mind wandering, just stepping outside for a minute, breathing in the fresh air, taking a walk, just sitting back in your chair and doing some daydreaming.

And then one more hour or another 45 minute period of central executive mode thinking.

Now the only way central executive mode really works is if in you’re in attentional filter doesn’t really have to be working in overdrive. That means you’ve got to figure out how to create an environment that allows you to focus, free of distraction.

The good news is, I’m going to tell you how. You’ve already got the notes from this episode, and if you didn’t do that and you’d like to have the notes from this episode, all you have to do is text the word laser to this number, 949-655-4337.

By the way, if you’re a regular listener of the Chalene Show, that’s the number I – if this works and you like it, that’s the number I’ll always use so save that in your phone and list it as me. And then you’ll be like when you’re with your friends, “hey, excuse me, Chalene’s texting me, got to go.” And then every week, I’ll give you – I mean, assuming this works, I’ll give you a phrase that you can associate with each particular episode.

So this episode, all you do is text the word, laser. Now you’ll notice in those notes that there’s two parts, right?

The first we go over all the steps that helps you understand the brain, because when you understand the brain, and you understand what’s happening, it’s just like, “Ahh… I get it”.

Now in the next part, part two, what I’m going to do is share with you all my best tips for creating an environment where ain’t nobody going to bug you.

You can get into your central executive mode and have no one bother you. Yes, I’m going to teach you how to do this. I’ve got some brilliant tips, some of which you may have thought of, some of which you’ve never heard before and I promise it’s going to make you incredibly effective, it’s going to reduce your stress and it’s going to allow you to get more done in less time.

If you’re down with that, please, download now, part 2.

**[END OF RECORDING]**