

Three minutes and fifty-two seconds. That's how long Savage Garden's *I Want You* played for, and I could easily spin it on repeat, singing and dancing along. In fact, I could listen to the whole album of songs following *I Want You*, thoroughly immersed in every wonderfully melodic moment. That was less than ten years ago. While I will always

ATTENTION *please*

adore my Savage Garden albums – unapologetically so – if I'm listening any one of those songs now (and this goes for any song at all, really), it is doubtful that I would not be checking email, replying to a text, scrolling through Twitter or hashtagging on Instagram by the time the second chorus rolls around.

Can you relate? I bet you can, and I'd go as far as to say that with the exception of those who stringently practice meditation and mindfulness each and every day, the rest of us have lost the ability to sit still, focus and appreciate.

Michelle Loch, director and founder of UnLocked Potential (unlocked.com), is a certified professional business coach and is an expert in the neuroscience of leadership. She explains, "There is a neurological phenomenon being scientifically recognised referred to as Attention Deficit Trait – a condition induced by modern life, in which you become so busy attending to so many inputs and outputs that you become increasingly distracted, irritable, impulsive, restless and, over the long term, underachieving. My personal phrase is 'destructive distractions', and my mantra is distractions make you dumber."

What are we really missing out on then? Michelle answers, "The depth of colour in the world! Without time to fully appreciate 'anything' we skim on the surface of 'everything'. We take in less, retain less, appreciate less and therefore miss out on enjoying the wonderfulness of any moment or situation. It's like when

Have we lost the ability to listen to an entire song without being distracted?



Allowing ourselves to be distracted takes a toll on the brain's ability to make decisions, understand, memorise, recall and inhibit our non-productive behaviours, like stopping ourselves from eating the whole bar of chocolate.

heart rate goes up (to increase oxygen in your blood), your blood thickens (in case you are injured), your digestive system shuts down (you don't want to waste precious energy digesting food when you are dealing with danger), and your brain moves to reaction mode (and can make rash or inappropriate decisions). We need this, because this process is what allows us to jump out of the way of an oncoming car without thinking about it – it's a non-conscious activity over which we have no control. The downside is that the constant nature of these responses means the presence of the stress hormones in our body is constant and even at a low level, they are destructive over the long term. Cortisol in the long term decreases the ability of the brain to learn and memorise, it inhibits the neuroplasticity of the brain (its ability to adapt and grow), it causes bone demineralisation, increases weight, causes inflammation and reduces immunity. The list goes on. It's not good for you long term. It increases the wear and tear of your body."

It's not too late to make a change though. "You can brain train, and train to manage your fight/flight system using a tool like MyCalmBeat (take a look at unlocked.com for more details). You can also work on getting externally focused with a structure. Set yourself three goals to achieve for the day – and don't waiver. Be mindful and check in on yourself regularly – 'Is what I am doing right now helping me to achieve those three things?'; 'Do I really need to check Facebook?'; 'Can I let that call go to the voicemail and check them all later?'; 'When we multi-task, that is, switch attention, we use up vital brain energy and for every

two minute distraction it takes us around 24 minutes to get back to the original focus – such a waste of time. Schedule your Facebook, phone messages and TV time and mindfully devote your full attention to them. Turning off the ones you don't want at that particular moment is the best strategy, as hearing the 'ding' is irresistible to our brain – it's survival drive says, 'I'd better check that out in case...!'"

Aside from structuring your day and tasks more carefully, specifically practising 'mindfulness' may be just the trick too (and it's not as hard as you may think). Michelle says, "Mindfulness is your ability to hold your attention in the present moment, without judgment. Being able to objectively observe and assess what is going on in the moment without emotional or judgmental filters. Simply practise focusing on your breathing for a whole five minutes without letting your thoughts wander, or practice washing up mindfully – challenge yourself – can you hold your attention fully on doing the washing up without allowing distractions. Or my favourite, take 10 minutes to eat a piece of chocolate and hold your attention fully on the process. Close your eyes and start by just feeling it in your hand, then take time to smell it and breathe it in, then start to eat it, savour the taste. It doesn't matter what you do, it's about your ability to hold your attention in one place. There are plenty of free mindfulness apps available if you want to get a head start."

Are you ready to try to focus with me then? I don't know about you, but I think I'll start by putting my phone on silent and giving that chocolate exercise a go – thanks for that Michelle!