

In this lesson, you'll learn about the incredible power that your environment has over your behavior and how to harness your existing environments or create new ones that will make you more productive.

So, did you know that the spaces you occupy can have a tremendous impact on the way you behave? They can actually change your behavior and make you more or less productive.

You probably *do* know that, but you might not think about it often or consider just how powerful your environments are.

The physical place that you're in and how you interact with it is so powerful it can even cure addictions.

In the 1970s, as the Vietnam war was winding down, two members of Congress visited the troops on the frontlines and returned to Washington D.C. to give the president a report. Things were really grim.

The war had been so hard on the troops and created such despair that as many as 30% of them had become addicted to heroin. Some of these troops couldn't even get through a day without a fix. It was ugly.

This was such a big problem that the president and his task force created an emergency plan for all the returning troops. They prepared addiction facilities and support programs, and even assigned case workers to follow returning troops around and make sure they stayed clean.

This was a big deal because tens of thousands of heroin addicted troops were about to come home all at once.

And when they did, everyone was ready and waiting.

And they waited. And waited. And waited some more. Eventually, they shut down the programs because no one needed them

Turns out, most of the troops gave up their addictions and got clean when they came home. And they did it on their own without any assistance.

Now, who's ever heard of someone addicted to heroin simply giving it up and immediately turning their life around? Almost no one because it almost never happens.

So what happened to these troops? How did they do it?

Well, a lot of study went into it after the fact and, what was learned was that it was all about environment. When the troops were in Vietnam, their lives were so unbearable that heroin became an escape from the horror they experienced day in and day out.

It relieved that pain and, since they had no idea when they were going to get out of their situation, they got hooked.

But when they came home, all the reasons that drove them to addiction in the first place disappeared. Instead of sleeping in the jungle, they were at home in their beds. Instead of being surrounded by enemies trying to kill them, they were surrounded by family members that loved them. And instead of having no idea what life would look like the next day, they started to gain some assurance that everything would be okay.

And, just like that, the need for the drugs to fix all that fear and uncertainty went away. They cured their own addictions automatically just by coming home to a healthier environment.

I think that's an incredibly powerful story. And you and I can use the lesson from it to take more control over our lives and become more productive as well.

And that lesson is: Whatever it is you want to achieve, design an environment for yourself that will support that goal.

One of my most important goals is to create useful content on a regular basis and find new and interesting ways to deliver that content. My livelihood depends on it, so I need an environment that is specifically designed to help me do that work day in and day out.

Now, I also primarily work from home where, you know, you're supposed to relax or work and spend time with your family.

Those two things don't go together very well!

That's why I have a room in our house that's been turned into my office, and it's specifically tuned for work. Everything I need to get my daily tasks done is right there, and anything that could distract me from those tasks... is not.

I have a desk I can sit or stand at. There's almost nothing on it. I have a small paper file to collect loose, distracting papers. The room is sparsely decorated with a few totems that remind me of some of the successes I've had in the past. The shades

control how much light comes in, and a space heater and small air conditioner control the temperature from season to season.

When I walk into my office and close the door, I immediately snap into work mode. Everything about the space is engineered to motivate me to forget about everything else and get to work.

It's one of the most important pieces of my overall work system.

And if you want to be more productive, you need to engineer your environments as well.

That doesn't mean you need a dedicated home office. What it means is that you should think about whatever work is most important to your success and design an experience for yourself whenever you do that work.

Think about all five senses and what you can add to whatever space you're in to support that work. Or what you need to subtract that might distract you from it.

So, start with sight. What things need to be around you to make you more likely to do the work you need to do. Or what things are normally around you that are distracting and need to be put away.

If you have a space that you can dedicate to this, then that's best. But you don't *have* to have a space. You could also keep everything you need in a kit so that it's readily accessible. So, if you don't have dedicated desk at home or at work, maybe there's a tray nearby where you can scoop up and dump miscellaneous papers and items that are laying around so your workspace is clear.

And maybe you have a container of tools or other things you need that's takes just a moment to pull out and set up. The less friction and fewer steps the better.

Now, think about sound. What's the most motivating music you could play for whatever it is you're trying to accomplish. Or maybe it's not music at all. Are there some other sounds—you know, an album of nature sounds or something—that you can turn on to put you in the headspace you want to be in?

If you're at home or somewhere you won't bother others, have a speaker and the music you want easily accessible. If you're at work or somewhere public, make sure you have some headphones you can pop in whenever necessary.

You can think about sound in terms of subtraction as well. So, what sounds might distract you? And how can you eliminate them?

If I'm working at home and my wife is also home and doing things around the house that I can hear, I'll put my headphones in. Or if I don't want music, I have a pair of high quality ear plugs nearby that I can use.

So, figure out what sounds will support your work, and make it easy to have them ready. And figure out what sounds will distract you and put a plan together to eliminate them when you're trying to work.

Now, I don't have too many strong smell associations, but you might. So, ask yourself if there's any way you can incorporate your sense of smell into your environment.

I know that my wife likes to light a fragrant candle when she's trying to read or study something. Something about the flame and the smell of the candle... it helps her get into a more focused headspace.

Perhaps you can do something similar.

And what about feel? What do you need to physically feel or touch to be as productive and focused as possible? At first, this might be a hard one to answer. It was for me, anyway. But if you concentrate and imagine yourself in your most productive state, what are you interacting with?

For me, it was a comfortable chair. I can work in any chair, but the chair in my office has a specific feel to it. And, funny as it sounds, when I sit down in it, I know that it's time to get to work.

Maybe there's a certain type of clothes you need to wear to get yourself motivated. If you work in an office, it could be a certain type of suit material. Or, if you work outdoors, maybe it's a certain type of boot.

Even though I work from home, I'm far more productive when I get myself dressed and don't try to work in my underwear.

My wife gets really jealous that I can spend a whole day working without ever getting dressed, but the truth is: I can't. I need to make myself look like a productive human in order to feel and act like one.

When I try to break that rule, it doesn't really work out.

Okay, finally, let's talk about taste. Unless you're a chef, that's a weird one to think about incorporating, but if you can find something that fits, it'll strengthen that environment even more.

Personally, I like to have a cup of tea handy when I'm writing. It's not really mandatory for me, but having a nice cup of herbal tea helps me get in the right brainspace to do the kind of work I do.

On the other hand, I've learned I cannot work and eat at the same time. So, when I need to be productive, I avoid food. When I try to eat while working, I end up jumbling my thoughts and focusing on the food. Nothing gets done.

So, that's what works for me. But think about what might work for you? Do you need a snack nearby so you don't have to break your concentration when you get hungry? Maybe a cup of water or some other beverage?

Or maybe you're like me with food and you need to keep it far away when you're working in order to get your best work done.

Take a minute today to think about where your productive environments are. And when you're in them, how can you engage as many of your senses as possible?

What things can you add or subtract from the space so that, when you're ready to work, all of those things snap into place and force your brain to associate them with productivity.

The more you engineer your environments to support the kind of work you want to do, the stronger your association with those things will become, and the easier it'll be to get into work mode and stay there.