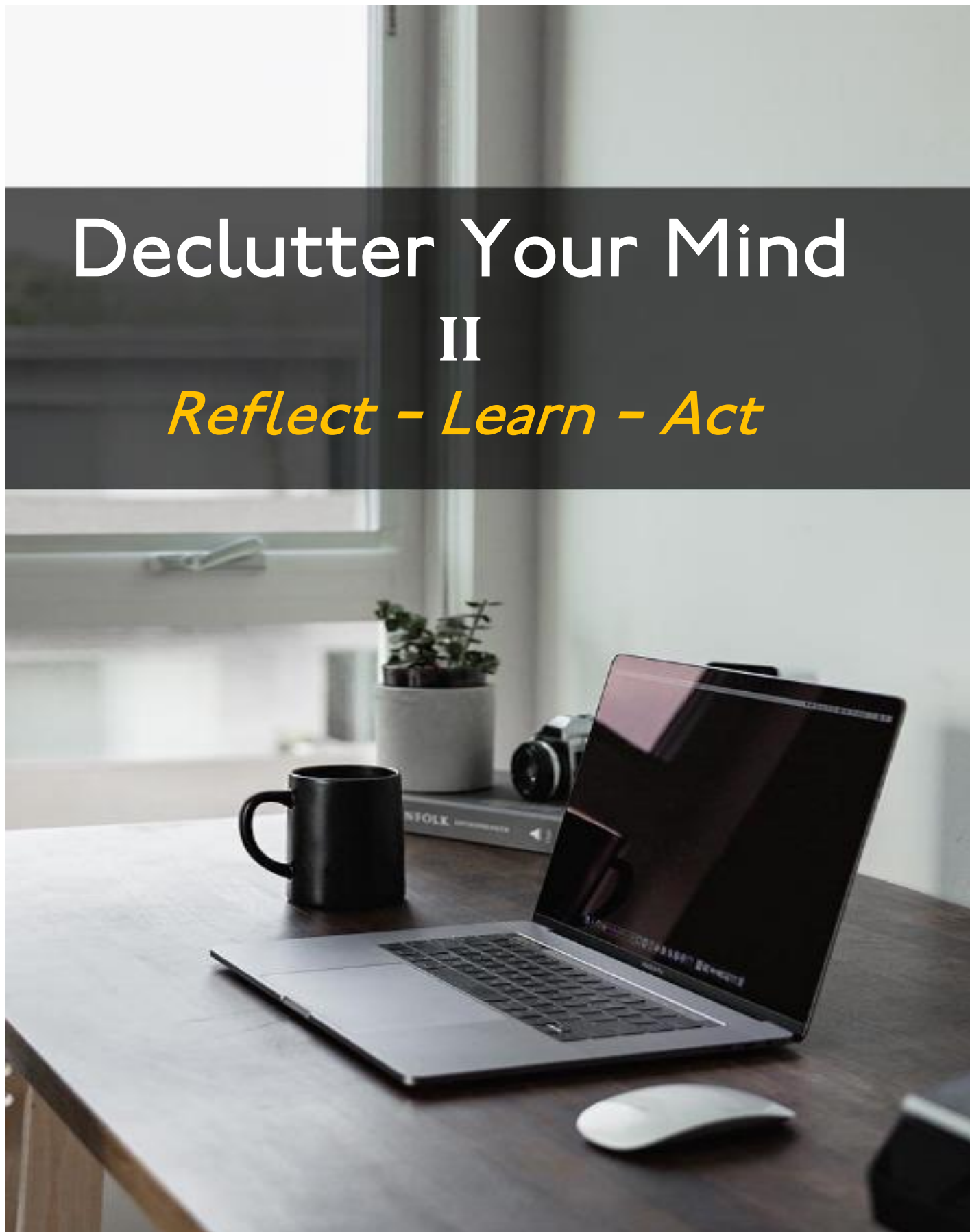# Declutter Your Mind
II
Reflect - Learn - Act

Beyond the Far Cliffs offers training, coaching, and assessments. One special program for this topic is a 30-day "Reflect – Learn – Act" program for a team.

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Why Clearing Mental Clutter Is So Important

You don't have to be a hoarder to collect a lot of clutter. You don't even need to own much stuff to have an environment full of distracting, unneeded, unnecessary items getting in your way. They may not be physically impeding you in any way, but they are still affecting you.

That's because your five senses are constantly doing what they do. Why else would you have them if they weren't always listening, looking, tasting, touching, and smelling your surroundings? They do this to alert you to potentially negative experiences.

- You hear your alarm go off, meaning work when you would rather keep sleeping.
- You taste onions in a casserole that looked so good, but those onions make it oh so bad.
- You feel a few raindrops on your skin, letting you know you'd better seek shelter.

They also let you know of possibly positive situations.

- You overhear your boss saying he will be leaving early today, and that's a beautiful thing.
- You smell freshly baked bread.
- You see, there are only five more minutes before you clock out from work and start a week-long vacation.

There seems to be a lot of work displeasure in these examples, doesn't there? By the way, if you want to know how negatively physical and non-physical clutter can affect you, consider this.

You have more than the five senses you are aware of.

Many neuroscientists, philosophers, psychologists, and others believe humans have dozens of senses that process our world and help us interact.

For instance, there's equilibrioception. This is a human sense that helps keep you balanced. It's quietly working all the time to keep you from falling over. There's also proprioception. This sense lets you unconsciously understand which parts of your body are located where.

Clutter Distracts Your Senses, Whether You Have 5, 15 or 25

When there are things in your environment you don't need for the task at hand, your senses are distracted. You only have so much mental energy devoted to conscious activities.

> **This means you quickly run out of mental focus when your surroundings are cluttered.**

Then on top of that is the long list of harmful emotions caused by mental clutter. Mental clutter includes future worry, obsession over the past, stress, fear, anxiety, and other negative perceptions.

All of this clutter in your mind wrecks your ability to focus. It destroys your productivity and efficiency. When this happens, you may suffer from self-doubt, frustration, self-resentment, and other negative feelings because you don't get much done.

> **What's the answer? How do you enjoy less stress and anxiety, more productivity, and a clearer, more focused mind? The answer is simple. Clear out the mental and physical clutter.**

Clean your environments of physical clutter. Stop dropping things wherever you are and put them in their rightful place. Quit obsessing over the past and worrying so much about the future. Forgive people rather than constantly thinking about

what they did to you. Limit the amount of stress you voluntarily place yourself in, at work and in your personal life.

Whenever you sense some negative emotions, observe them. Where are they coming from? What's causing them? If your thoughts aren't necessary and they are messing with your mind, get rid of them.

Unresolved mental clutter can be as dangerous as physical clutter that proposes a trip-and-fall possibility or a fire hazard. Get busy removing unnecessary thoughts and obsessions from your life. Clear out sensory clutter; you will enjoy less stress and anxiety and more mental clarity and focus.

Take Charge of Your Mental Clutter
& Stop Worrying About Things You Can't Control

Brain-based clutter is stressful. It's generated by having too much going on in your mind. You're trying to deal with too many things at once. That isn't easy, even on your best day.

Focusing on this modern world with its many distractions is tough. We often make it tougher than it needs to be. This happens when we refuse to say no to our friends. They are always asking favors, and we're always saying yes. That's a perfect stress-building recipe because we seldom tend to our own needs and responsibilities. We're too busy trying to please others.

Other needless distractions include things we did in our past. It might be true that you could have made better choices. That's the case with all of us. But obsessing over your past might be one of the most fruitless activities you can undertake. You have absolutely no control over what has already happened, so constantly thinking about it unnecessarily clutters your brain.

We also create a mental mess that doesn't need to be there when we spend our valuable time thinking about things we have no control over. This keeps you from living your best life. It needlessly ramps up your levels of worry and stress.

Honestly Appraise What You May Be Able to Influence

Maybe you believe you have a lot of influence over a friend of yours. Regardless of any proof you might think you have that backs up your belief, you are dead wrong.

You have absolutely no control over anyone but yourself.

If you're like most people, you find it difficult enough to control your own actions and thoughts. While you may believe you can influence others to take certain actions, what happens if they quit listening to you?

Be honest with yourself. In most situations, all you can control is your behaviors, emotions, and attitude. To discover if you are unnecessarily cluttering your mind, list those things in your life you're constantly thinking about that you do and don't have control over.

Act on What You Can Control, Talk about What You Can't

We often try to control things outside our influence because we feel frustrated. If your actions are fruitless, it makes no sense to bang your head against a brick wall.

You know what we mean. If you consistently think about, worry over, and act upon things you can't control, you will be frustrated, stressed out, and constantly filling your mind with mental clutter.

So make that list. Once you've made a list of the things you can control, that's where your thoughts and efforts need to be directed. If you can't control something in your life but you'd like it to change, talk about it. Mention it to the significant people in your life that might help you change that situation. Then whether or not you get the change you're looking for, move on.

You can't control what you can't control. Just tell yourself that over and over. This can keep you from needlessly wasting your time and mental energy, which means less mental clutter.

Turn Worrying into Problem-Solving
to Remove Mental Clutter

Clutter of the mind is and isn't like physical or visual clutter. It's similar to clutter. You can see that it can be very distracting. The difference is you can't reach out your hand and remove a piece of mental clutter like you can the physical things unnecessarily littering your space.

Mental clutter is insidious because you may not realize how much energy is devoted to dealing with it. Clutter of the mind includes those random thoughts that appear all day long, no matter what you do.

HealthyBrains.org tells us that the average person processes about 70,000 thoughts every day. That's a lot of thinking. Of course, the vast majority of these happen without your permission. Dr. Fred Luskin of Stanford University says that of the many thousands of thoughts each person has, as many as 90% are repetitive.

So you needlessly think thousands of thoughts you have no control over, and most of them have been around before. That is a ton of mental clutter. One way to deal with much of it is to stop worrying and solve problems.

Worrying Leads to More Negative Thoughts

Why are most of your thoughts negative? The way the human brain developed means there is a negativity bias you have to deal with. For some reason, negative thoughts and experiences are given more attention than positive ones. One of the most negative aspects of this process is worry.

We worry about things all of the time, don't we? It seems worrying is a favorite human pastime. The problem with this is that worrying never gets you to a point of resolution.

That's why you should turn worrying into problem-solving.

The next time your ceaseless thinking machine cranks out another worrisome thought, address it. Instead of worrying, look at this thought as a problem. How can you solve it? How can you make the best out of this situation? If all you can see is negativity, look for the silver lining in the cloud.

Imagine that the following thought pops into your head.

You've been having some issues with a friend. You said some things, and she said some things, and now you aren't sure if the two of you are in a good place in your relationship. If you have enough spare time, you can waste hours, if not days, of your life, worrying and imagining all sorts of terrible scenarios.

> **Or you can create a game plan that addresses the situation. Instead of worrying endlessly, solve the problem.**

Schedule a meeting if you can't call or see your friend immediately. Talk it out. Most of the time, the things we worry about and imagine are going to be so terrible never end up being anywhere as miserable as we thought they would be.

To de-clutter your mind, stop worrying so much. When worry is prompted by your constantly negative thoughts, look at it as a problem that can be solved. Then solve it.

This is a simple way to keep mental clutter from building up in your brain. You might also find a lot more positivity in your life. Now you are solving problems when in the past you worried over them and let them fester.

The Twice-a-Day Ritual That De-Clutters Your Mind

Scott Bea is a clinical psychologist who understands how clutter can wreck your mental and physical health. He tells us that visual clutter, anything that falls within your line of sight but isn't necessary, cranks up your production of cortisol. That means more stress and anxiety.

Clutter negatively affects your self-esteem level, even if you don't consciously believe it's that big of a problem. Mental and physical clutter kills your ability to focus and be productive and can lead to sleep loss.

Physical clutter in your environment can lead to mental clutter.

Your senses are constantly trying to deal with everything they detect in your messy, disorganized space. This fogs up your brain and gets it working overtime. When you remove visual, physical, and mental clutter from your life, you gain better control of not only your mental abilities. You also boost your self-esteem and feel good about what you've accomplished.

The Downside of a Cluttered Mind

Before we discuss how you can do some spring cleaning in your mind, let's get a little negative. Sometimes understanding the downside of a situation can motivate you to take action. Here are a few of the unfortunate symptoms of a cluttered mind.

- You constantly focus on the negative and have difficulty seeing things positively.
- You worry about things you have no control over.
- It isn't easy focusing your attention and having clarity of thought.
- You are easily and frequently distracted.

- Your brain never shuts down and is always processing information from multiple topics and lists.
- A cluttered mind can lead to multiple sleep problems.
- It's common to feel physically drained, mentally confused, and unproductive.

When your mind is cluttered with unnecessary "stuff," a lot of energy is required to deal with it. This can make you feel run down and fatigued. You don't feel like doing anything or dealing with anything.

Don't worry; there is a simple solution you can use twice a day to sleep better and relieve the stress your mental clutter is causing. You will find it easier to focus, and you'll be more productive as well. Here's what you need to do.

1 – Write it down when you wake up.
2 – Write it down when you go to bed.

What is the "it" that you should be writing down? Your thoughts. Your feelings. Anything that's going on in your head. In the morning, write out a game plan for the day. Prioritize important things and keep everything else off of your list.

At night, read over what you wrote that morning. Then unload your mind. Back up the mental dump truck and get it all out. If random thoughts bother you during the day and are still on your mind, let them stand up and be recognized.

Writing out your thoughts is such a powerful way to clear your mind. When you do this regularly in the morning and at night, you'll find you sleep better, and you're more productive during the day. This won't stop your ceaseless inner chatter. It gives you control over it while ensuring a lot of mental clutter doesn't take up full-time residency in your mind.

Schedule Your Worries for a Clutter-Free Mind

The odds are you deal with mental clutter every day. Even the most mentally calm and focused individual engages in clutter-gathering activities. Do you ever ...

> ... ruminate needlessly over some experience in your past or some unknown situation in your future?
> ... obsess over an interaction you had with someone, good or bad?
> ... worry and "what if?" yourself crazy about something out of your control?
> ... hold tightly to negative experiences, emotions, and feelings?
> ... constantly surround yourself with external distractions and a continual barrage of sensory input?

These create mental clutter. It wastes your brain-based energy and your valuable time. These and other mentally cluttering activities lead to disorganization and distractions, confusion and a lack of mental control, poor productivity, and can even cause physical fatigue. The more mental clutter you experience, the more negative emotions and feelings you have to deal with.

Stop Worrying All of the Time and Schedule It Instead

You wouldn't be human if you didn't worry about different aspects of your life. You want to be your best and create the best life experience. That means you're going to fret, worry and wonder over any number of topics from time to time.

Your worry comes about because of fears, expectations, concern over potential outcomes, and other reasons. Instead of engaging these worries when they pop up, schedule a time each day to deal with what's happening in your mind. When something worrisome enters your mind, you tell yourself you'll deal with it at a previously scheduled time.

Then consciously get your mind involved with something else. Do anything that requires your conscious devotion. This will push your worry to the back burner of your mental stove, which can be dealt with later.

Stop spinning the wheels of your mental machinery. Your worries don't have to take over your mind and start cluttering your mental storage space. Deal with them by appointment, sometime in your schedule, where you can give them your undivided attention.

Schedule this worry-work at the same time each day and each week if possible. When you perform the same activity at the same time, eventually, your mind will notice. It begins to expect you to handle your worries at a designated time. You'll discover you start to worry less because your mind is used to ignoring these thoughts when they are off schedule. This can limit the worrisome thoughts you have to deal with throughout your day.