

The Interruption Audit

We've seen how interruptions can scatter our attention, upend our focus and hang our happy medium out to dry. We've also seen how limiting our options facilitates ease and allows us to make smarter choices. The more limitations we put on choice, the less confusion we face, the less stress we experience and the more our creativity can flourish. Possibilities expand as life slows down – not the other way around. By choosing deliberately and mindfully, we begin to understand the *why* behind our decisions and, in turn, find more purpose, direction and meaning.

In *The Happy Closet*, I introduced readers to the 'to don't' list – an exercise designed to help shoppers commit to what they wouldn't wear as opposed to what they would. This beautifully backward logic helps break bad habits and build new identity-based behaviours. In other words, discovering what you don't want flips the script from self-denial to self-empowerment. Apply the same principle to your 'no'-fly zone with the help of the interruption audit and FOMO becomes JOMO in a heartbeat. Nice one.

Need some pointers? Here's how to turn a 'to do' into a 'to don't'. When faced with an event you feel you need to attend or something you're under pressure to do, grab your trusty notebook and pen and ask yourself the following questions:

- What am I being asked to do?
- Why should I do it?
- Why shouldn't I do it? (Didn't think you were getting off the hook that lightly, did you?)
- Who benefits?

- What suffers?
- How do I feel about it?

Let's put this into context. Say, for instance, you've been invited to a work mixer that oozes with networking potential. Getting face-time with the big guys could mean a possible promotion down the road. Best start planting those seeds now, eh? But wait! Didn't your doctor insist you take extra rest this week on account of that nasty case of shingles you recently acquired? You might be itching for a title upgrade (boom cha!), but you've got to look at the bigger picture, my friend. Besides, trying to figure out how to have a sneaky scratch while the VP of marketing riffs about the latest campaign strategy may not be the golden opportunity you imagined. To do? Not so much.

When writing *The Happy Medium*, for example, I put JOMO at the top of my priority list by enforcing the following limits: I scaled back on my work commitments as far as I could financially sustain for a three-month period, then I activated my out of office for three months which read something like this:

I'm taking some time out to write my second book so apologies if I don't respond to your mail. You may contact me on the number below if your query is urgent; otherwise, I'll catch up with you all in mid-July. Thanks for your understanding.

I did the same with my social media accounts and put myself on social hiatus while I finished writing the book. The prospect of missing out on meeting friends and attending work events was mitigated by the bigger picture – submitting my manuscript within a set timeframe. Those three months became my 'no'-fly zone. The great thing about it? By explaining my rationale to friends and family, I could fall off the grid without falling out of favour. Everyone was entirely supportive of the whole process, offering to help in any way

they could. Had I assumed otherwise and overextended myself, things could have turned out very differently.

If in doubt, remember: there's always a FOMO trade-off. Sometimes, we have to exchange kicks and giggles for eight hours' consecutive shut-eye so that we can deliver a presentation the next day without feeling like we've been dragged through a hedge backward. And other times, we've got to take one for the team and do a solid for someone in need. Life always presents us with ebb and flow. It's up to us to establish the checks and balances as we figure out our happy medium. Consider the checklist above a handy tool, one for the back pocket when overwhelm comes knocking and perspective has made a run for the door.

The 'Me' Timer

When it comes to 'me' time, we tend to get sandblasted with an abrasive case of the guilts. Call it conditioning, call it societal pressure, call it whatever you want; there's no glossing over the fact that we're all prone to confusing self-care with selfishness. Taking 20 minutes to sit in your garden? Slacker! Swapping that optional after-work function for a much-needed yoga class? Part-timer!

It's not that we want to be *that* busy, but not wanting to can carry a larger stigma: not being a team player, not caring or, worse, not being hungry enough. Toss in the fear of job loss or social exclusion and the result is, literally, overwhelming. Anxiety, burnout and stress can all combine to have a pernicious effect on our lives – so it's time to establish small but regular personal boundaries in a bid to maintain our happy medium.

The beauty of the 'me' timer exercise is its short and sweet disposition: it carves out a pocket of time dedicated to you and you only that can mean the difference between feeling

frazzled and feeling focused, thriving or barely surviving. Consider this your daily ‘no’-fly zone. Should anyone interrupt this sacred session, you’ve got permission to shoot them down with a steely stare. The idea is to create space in your routine for ritual and gain a sense of agency in your day.

For this exercise, you’ll need:

- A timer
- Time.

Begin by deciding how much time you have to allocate to yourself. If your diary is heaving like a Balmain sample sale, start small. Try setting aside 10 minutes every day for a month dedicated to your well-being. How you fill your ‘me’ time is entirely up to you. Ideally, it should be something that feeds flow on which you can surf the rest of your day. Come the second month, increase that number to 15 or 20 minutes and see how you feel.

Once you start reaping the benefits of your practice, you’ll begin to get clarity on the things that matter and those that don’t. If you have one of those days that hits you over the head and you have no choice but to do everything, this ritual will reinforce a sense of control in an otherwise chaotic world. Set your timer. Your time starts now!

For me, my ‘me’ timer starts at 7 am every morning for a half hour. I’m a sucker for a French press and the radio and those 30 minutes before giving myself over to the day. Why? Because there’s no compelling reason to accomplish anything bar enjoying that alone time with a cup of coffee, some easy listening and my thoughts. What motivates me upon waking is that quiet corner of time; what comes afterwards is a consequence of that.

My friend takes a book into the bathroom and reads for 10 minutes while her husband keeps their toddler occupied. Little Johnny knows if Mommy is ‘taking a bath’, he can’t barge in, so

she cleverly co-opts this knowledge to her advantage when in need of a mini reboot. Needless to say, Johnny is going to grow up thinking adults bathe several times a day. Meh! A small price to pay.

Now that we've limited FOMO with some mindful diary management, our task is to fill those gaps of time by increasing JOMO. Meditation creates JOMO by helping us focus on and connect with the moment. Scientific studies support claims that the practice of meditation reduces stress and anxiety by taking the brainwaves into an alpha state, which helps us not to feel overwhelmed.

Think of it like expandable foam: something that insulates against life's little speed wobbles and reinforces our happy medium. For me, I like to finish my day with 10 minutes of meditation and a mental gratitude riff on what I've got to be thankful for. This keeps me tapped into the present and less likely to ruminate on what I did or didn't do that day, how things played out or what I could have done differently. It stops my inner maximiser from keeping me awake at night and quietens the Miss Moan who has a habit of b*tching and whining when she doesn't get her way.

When it comes to mind games, some are definitely worth playing. Let's check 'em out.