Practical ways to interrupt autopilot and build your capacity for deliberate judgment.

01 PURPOSE

Your brain is remarkably good at going automatic. Most of the time, that's an advantage. But discernment requires the ability to notice when automatic isn't enough. **Go Manual is a collection of simple practices for building that ability.**

02 HOW IT WORKS

The practices build four abilities. Some take a few seconds; others take a few minutes or work best as regular habits. You don't need to do them all. Practice recognizing autopilot and intentionally shifting into a more deliberate mode.

03 WHEN TO USE IT

Don't wait for a difficult decision. Use these practices throughout your day to build the habit of noticing, pausing, and directing your attention on purpose. Then, when the stakes are higher, use the same moves to slow an automatic response, see what you might be missing, and choose more deliberately.

The more practiced you are at leaving autopilot when nothing is at stake, the easier it becomes when something is. Learning to inhabit that deliberate space is part of learning to lead.

> "You cannot lead well from a place you have never learned to inhabit.

PAUSE

Create a little space between impulse and action.

- **MicroStop.** Randomly stop for 7 to 17 seconds. Don't reach, scroll, talk, or do. Just stop.
- **Name It.*** Pause and put one word to what you're feeling: rushed, annoyed, excited, defensive, anxious. Notice it before it starts deciding for you.
- **Double In, Long Out.*** Take two inhales through your nose, then one long, slow exhale. Repeat 2 to 3 times.
- **Kill the Ping.*** Choose a block of time and silence every notification. Notice how often your attention still goes looking for one.
- **Catch the Reach.** Catch yourself reaching for your phone. Stop and ask: "Why am I picking this up?"
- **Notice 5.** Stop. Look and listen. Name five things you hadn't noticed until you deliberately paid attention.

RESET

Notice your body's signals without automatically reacting to them or deciding what they mean.

- **Body Scan.*** Close your eyes for 30 seconds and turn your attention inward. What can you notice without checking? Your heartbeat? Breathing? Tension? Warmth? Pressure? Movement? Don't change it or decide what it means. Just practice noticing what's there.
- **Thinking Walk.*** Take a walk somewhere green. No phone, podcast, or music. Let your directed attention rest.

> "This isn't a checklist.
> It's a menu.
>
> Pick a move and Go Manual.

WIDEN

Slow down long enough to see what else might be true.

- **Three Stories.** Catch yourself explaining someone's behavior. Come up with two more explanations that could also be true.
- **Ask, Don't Guess.*** Catch yourself assuming what someone thinks, wants, or means. Ask them.
- **Pre-Mortem.*** Pick something you're planning. Imagine it's six months from now and it failed. What are three reasons why?
- **Use Your Name.*** Ask yourself, using your own name: "What is [your name] being pulled to do right now?"
- **Find the Missing Voice.** In your next meeting or conversation, ask: "Whose perspective haven't I heard?"
- **Name the Avoidance.** Once a day, ask: "What am I avoiding right now?"
- **Find Option C.** When you notice an either/or choice, come up with one more option.

PREPARE

Strengthen your ability to direct and sustain attention.

- **If, Then.*** Pick one automatic behavior to interrupt. Decide your response ahead of time: "If I notice myself doing _____, then I will _____."
- **Don't Respond.** Once a day, deliberately leave a little space before answering a question, solving a problem, or giving advice.
- **Find a Thinking Place.** Choose one place where you regularly think without inputs. No notifications. No inbox. No scrolling. Just uninterrupted thought.
- **Meditate.*** Sit quietly for 5 to 10 minutes and focus on your breath. When your mind wanders, notice it and bring your attention back. Wandering isn't failure. Noticing is the rep.
- **Full Focus.*** Regularly do something that demands your complete attention. Ride single track. Play an instrument. Climb. Build something. Practice a difficult skill. Choose something where your mind can't wander very far without you noticing.

Moves marked with an asterisk (*) are informed by the research on page 3.

Research References

Moves marked with an asterisk (*) are informed by the research below.

Double In, Long Out

Balban, M. Y., et al. (2023). Brief structured respiration practices enhance mood and reduce physiological arousal. Cell Reports Medicine. Daily 5 minute cyclic sighing improved mood and lowered breathing rate more than mindfulness in a randomized trial.

Name It

Lieberman, M. D., et al. (2007). Putting feelings into words. Psychological Science. Labeling an emotion reduced amygdala response to negative images in a brain imaging study.

Use Your Name

Kross, E., et al. (2014). Self talk as a regulatory mechanism. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. Referring to yourself by name rather than “I” improved self distancing and performance under stress across seven studies.

Ask, Don’t Guess

Eyal, T., Steffel, M., & Epley, N. (2018). Perspective mistaking. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. Across 25 experiments, perspective taking alone did not improve accuracy about another person’s mind, and sometimes reduced it.

Pre-mortem

Mitchell, D., Russo, J. E., & Pennington, N. (1989); popularized by Klein, G. (2007), Performing a project premortem, Harvard Business Review. Prospective hindsight increased the number of reasons generated for an outcome by about 30 percent. It did not improve accuracy by 30 percent, a common overstatement of this finding.

If, Then

Gollwitzer, P. M., & Sheeran, P. (2006). Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes. Meta-analysis of 94 tests, over 8,000 participants.

Kill the Ping

Stothart, C., Mitchum, A., & Yehnert, C. (2015). The attentional cost of receiving a cell phone notification. Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance. Receiving a notification alone disrupted attention task performance, even without touching the phone.

Body Scan

Dunn, B. D., et al. (2010). Listening to your heart. Psychological Science. Better heartbeat perception helped or hurt intuitive decisions depending on whether body signals pointed toward good or bad choices. Draws on interoception research, how accurately people sense internal body signals, traditionally measured with heartbeat counting tasks (Schandry, 1981).

Meditate

Mrazek, M. D., et al. (2013). Mindfulness training improves working memory capacity and GRE performance. Psychological Science. A 2 week mindfulness course improved reading comprehension and working memory and reduced mind wandering in 48 undergraduates versus a nutrition class control. Small sample.

Full Focus

Marty-Dugas, J., Howes, L., & Smilek, D. (2021). Sustained attention and the experience of flow. Psychological Research. Greater state-level flow during a sustained attention task predicted fewer errors, with the effect strengthening over time.

Thinking Walk

Berman, M. G., Jonides, J., & Kaplan, S. (2008). The cognitive benefits of interacting with nature. Psychological Science. Walking in nature, or even viewing nature photos, improved attention on memory and attention tasks.