

Denial Beats Distraction



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Forgetting, denial, suppression, and neglect are all essential to effective cognitive function in general, and to concentration in particular. This may sound like a bad thing because of all the negative press about denial that has been so popular in the last century, but denial is really a good thing and you should continue to refine your proficiency in suppressing unwanted thoughts and information throughout your lifetime. The world has *way* too much information in it and discrimination is the essence of elegance, which is both adaptive and comfortable. People who have or learn these skills do better than people who don't. People who suppress unwanted thoughts and information skillfully, intentionally, and on reflection do better still.

These questions have recently fallen within the scope of cognitive neurobiology, where they have been examined experimentally. Contrary to intuition and to popular wisdom, an honest effort to forget something actually works in a wide variety of situations! A great many unwary subjects have now been instructed to *intentionally refuse to recall* information that they have previously learned. They are generally not told how to do this but it is clear that an honest effort renders the suppressed information far less accessible, even much later and under completely different circumstances. Active denial and thought suppression really work and some people are much better at it than others. But you already knew this.

You also know that distraction *doesn't* work and elegant new research from the Cambridge brain lab has confirmed this. The thing you are trying to avoid will inevitably come back to bite you, undiminished in its ferocity. Distraction is often mistaken for denial, but the difference is night and day. In order to recognize the positive therapeutic benefit of active denial it is only necessary to acknowledge that some of your current thoughts and beliefs are dysfunctional and possibly wrong. You will probably not find this to be much of a stretch, otherwise we should talk. Your identified dysfunctional thoughts and beliefs are the ideal targets of your intentional and energetic neglect, which you should cultivate and refine. Call me.

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