

IT TAKES WHAT IT TAKES

How to Think Neutrally *and*
Gain Control *of* Your Life

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with ANDY STAPLES

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Let's take a little test to see how good you are at focusing your personal ad campaign. The first part you can do by yourself, but you'll need a friend or a family member to help you with the next two parts.

For the first part, you're going to have sixty seconds. So grab your smartphone and set the timer for a minute. On the next page you'll see a grid with the numbers 0 through 99, arranged randomly. (Don't flip the page and peek—you'll only cheat yourself.) When you get to the end of this page, I'll give you a number. When you flip the page, your job will be to find that number and cross it out with an X. Then you'll find the next number in consecutive descending order. You'll repeat this until your buzzer sounds. Then you'll count how many numbers you crossed out.

Your number is . . . 83. GO!

84	27	51	78	59	52	13	85	61	55
28	60	92	04	97	90	31	57	29	33
32	96	65	39	80	77	49	86	18	70
76	87	71	95	98	81	01	46	88	00
48	82	89	47	35	17	10	42	62	34
44	67	93	11	07	43	72	94	69	56
53	79	05	22	54	74	58	14	91	02
06	68	99	75	26	15	41	66	20	40
50	09	64	08	38	30	36	45	83	24
03	73	21	23	16	37	25	19	12	63

Score: _____

That was a little tougher than you thought it would be, wasn't it? Well, get ready, because most people find this next one tougher. Find a family member, a friend, a co-worker, or a kind stranger. Reset your timer to a minute. You'll be doing the same thing, but the person helping you will be staring at you silently the entire time.

Are you ready?

Your number is . . . 77. GO!

66	34	82	28	73	56	42	63	07	72
85	94	01	15	83	90	11	38	92	43
10	75	62	21	08	35	67	52	16	30
29	81	47	98	44	88	26	57	55	23
97	39	71	24	50	78	74	02	96	80
51	68	03	64	17	93	22	84	09	59
18	27	46	54	31	12	40	14	48	36
91	86	13	00	05	37	60	69	32	76
49	06	33	58	77	65	45	19	99	61
25	89	41	95	20	70	87	53	04	79

Score: _____

How did you do? Was that easier or harder? Most people find it harder. The person watching us isn't saying anything, but being observed tends to make us more self-conscious. That can disrupt or change the dialogue we're having with ourselves. What did you think as you searched for each number? Did you worry that the person watching thought you were stupid if you couldn't find them fast enough? Did you worry about what they thought of you at any point? I bet that if you did, it made finding those next numbers harder. That's because those thoughts replaced the thoughts you needed to be thinking to find the next number. After you found 77, your only thought should have been "find 76." Most people aren't wired that way. But you can rewire yourself.

Don't let that friend wander off to make a sandwich. You're going to need their help one more time. And they're probably going to enjoy this one. Reset your timer to a minute. Now tell your friend that when you start, they need to trash talk you mercilessly. Okay, maybe not completely mercilessly—no touching, no four-letter words. But within those rules, tell them to say whatever they think they need to say to distract you.

Are you ready?

Are they ready?

Your number is . . . 33. GO!

19	00	95	60	25	83	97	93	52	24
40	06	77	69	15	98	08	78	61	54
84	14	26	62	48	36	22	34	04	47
88	82	55	87	01	41	39	18	58	89
21	68	09	33	44	53	43	73	64	13
28	74	57	80	65	70	10	27	81	91
46	38	16	23	49	17	30	76	05	51
03	75	42	63	02	59	90	20	32	67
29	66	11	71	45	94	12	37	56	85
35	92	31	50	86	99	79	96	07	72

Score: _____

Okay. Count them up. How many did you get? For most people, that last round has the lowest score. And while it seems like an external factor—the trash talk—caused you to struggle, it really was your own inner dialogue. If your mind had kept saying “find 32,” it would have found 32 faster. But once it said, “Wait, how did she know *that*?” it stopped saying “find 32.” You can train yourself to keep running the “find 32” commercial instead of letting your brain change the channel. But it takes practice. As you go about daily tasks, pay attention to how often your mind drifts. Bring it back to the task at hand by telling yourself exactly what you need to do. Think back to Russell and his keys to the 2014 season:

- Great fundamentals
- Great balance
- Be engaged

When chaos swirled around him, Russell centered himself by focusing on one of those three things. They brought him back to neutral and allowed him to keep executing. That internal ad campaign pushed out all other thoughts and allowed him to focus only on what mattered.