

THE LIFE-CHANGING PRACTICE
OF PAYING ATTENTION

L I S T E N



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D A Y

PAUL ANGONE

L I S T E N T O Y O U R D A Y

THE LIFE-CHANGING PRACTICE
OF PAYING ATTENTION

PAUL ANGONE



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Paul Angone, Listen to Your Day

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Contents

Introduction: Seeing through Inattentional Blindness 11

1. The Epic Journey Right Where You Are 17

PART ONE:

The Life-Changing Power of Paying Attention 23

2. The Lure of the Distraction 26

3. Un-Dividing Our Divided Attention 32

4. Paying Attention to How You Pay Attention 46

5. The Importance of Awkward, Boring, and Quiet Spaces 54

6. Paying Attention by Letting Your Mind Wander 64

7. The Importance of Seminal Memories 76

Mini-Break: Thoughts from the Bathtub on “Life Happening to Us” 86

8. Physical Component to the Mind 89

9. What Paying Attention to Your Excitement and Anxiety Can Tell You 95

Contents

10. Paying Attention to People 105
Mini-Break: Thoughts about Kids While Gardening 117
11. Stop, Pause, and Pay Attention—More on the Practice and Power of Paying Attention to People 119

PART TWO:

Cultivating Mindset Models 133

12. Entrepreneur Mindset Model 135
13. Farmer Mindset Model 146
14. Writer Mindset Model 158
15. Consultant Mindset Model 168
16. Investigator Mindset Model 175
17. Monk Mindset Model 183

Conclusion: A Life Lived Listening to Each Day 191
Big Thank-Yous 199
Notes 201

To my family.

My wife, Naomi, and our children,
Hannalise, Sierrah, Judah, and Jlynn.
Thank you for all the encouragement and sacrifices
to help make this book happen.
Love you all.

It has become extremely difficult for us to stop, listen, pay attention and receive gracefully what is offered to us.

—Henri Nouwen

Introduction

Seeing through Inattentional Blindness

What would you do if a bear moonwalked right in front of you?

Gasp?

Laugh?

Pull out your phone as quickly as possible to take a video?

What if I told you that you probably wouldn't do any of these things? What if I told you that you most likely wouldn't notice this moonwalking bear at all?

Not because the bear was hidden. It would be right in front of you. And yes, you wouldn't see it.

I know this because over the years, I've seen very smart people from around the world sitting in large classrooms, auditoriums, gyms, and conference halls—managers, VPs, and CEOs from all over the world in a grand ballroom at the Palazzo in Las Vegas—all miss the moonwalking bear that was moving right in front of them. No matter the size, age, education levels, or socioeconomic makeup of the audience, they always miss the moonwalking bear. It's wild. And they can't believe it either.

How is this possible? What am I talking about? Let me explain.

Over the years, I've played the same video in countless keynotes to all kinds of different industries. Maybe you've seen it? (Funny

At some level, I think every serious person in psychology has always believed that we don't consciously perceive everything that happens to us. The shocking thing was that you could show so little is being perceived.¹

—Harvard University psychologist Christopher Chabris, PhD,
researcher behind inattentional blindness

thing is, I've found that even if people have seen a similar type of video, they still don't notice the moonwalking bear.)

In the video, there are two teams. One in white clothes and the other in black, with one basketball for each team. The narrator asks a simple question: “How many passes does the team in white make?”

The video plays as the audience focuses in, counting the passes. After the passes are completed, the video pauses, and I ask the audience how many passes the team in white made. They all shout out in that excited unison when you're sure you have the right answer, “Thirteen!” They got it right! But then the narrator in the video asks, “But did you see the moonwalking bear?”

“What?!” Gasps and shouts fill the crowd. The video rewinds, and we watch the same sequence. But this time, the audience erupts in laughter as they now see the moonwalking bear that went slowly across the entire screen, which they hadn't seen the first time.

The screen goes black and the narrator says, “It's easy to miss something you're not looking for.”²

Why does everyone miss the moonwalking bear? It's because they aren't looking for one.

This video is tied into the psychological theory called *inattentional blindness*. A working definition of this phenomenon is “the failure to notice something right in front of you because other attention-demanding tasks are at hand.”

I'd argue this definition of inattentional blindness sums up the day-to-day of most of our lives. We miss all the moonwalking

bears. We miss the giant revelations, ideas, and truths walking right in front of us because we aren't *actually* looking for them. Or we don't know how to see them even when they pass right in front of us.

But we can shift our attention to start looking for them. We must form the habit and the practice to truly notice the giant truths moonwalking right in front of us.

It's not a problem with our eyesight. It's a problem with our inability to perceive and understand. We are losing the skill and art of paying attention. We think we see, but we don't.

So many of us are crying out for answers to the burning questions in our lives. We're desperate for clarity. So many things feel so ambiguous and confusing.

What path do I take? What job or career do I pursue? Is this the right person for me? What's my calling and passion? How do I parent these kids? If you're from a faith background, you've probably cried out to God more than once to give you the answers.

But maybe God has been answering those prayers for you all along. You just have not seen it. Better put, you have not perceived and understood. We spend most of our days seeing and hearing, yet not paying attention.

Praying for a Miracle

It's like the old parable of the man who is sitting on the roof of his house to escape a rapidly rising flood. He shouts to God to save him.

Studies of visual perception have demonstrated how startlingly little people see when we're not paying attention.³

—Siri Carpenter, American Psychological Association

Then a man with a boat comes by and offers the extra space to the man on the roof. “Jump in and I’ll get you to safety.” The man on the roof refuses. “I know God will save me, so I’ll wait here.”

Then a firefighter comes by and says to hurry down and he’ll get him out of harm’s way. The man refuses, saying he is waiting for God to save him.

The water rises higher and a helicopter hovers over him, a voice yelling at him through the megaphone to grab the rope and be pulled to safety. The man refuses and tries yelling up to the helicopter that he’s waiting for God to save him.

Well, the water keeps rising and the man on the roof gets swept away.

He goes to heaven and asks God, “Why didn’t you save me?”

God responds, “I sent you a boat, a firefighter, and even a helicopter! What more did you want?”

Jesus even warned us about inattentional blindness two thousand years ago:

You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

For this people’s heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I will heal them.

Matthew 13:14–15 NIV

Having Sight, but Not Seeing

The idea of inattentional blindness goes beyond what we see and hear as well. Famed author and activist Helen Keller was blind and deaf, and yet she *saw* more than most. She understood with

her heart and mind. She was paying attention in profound ways that led to wisdom and revelation. Or as Ms. Keller poignantly stated it, “The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight, but has no vision.”

How do we cultivate the habit and practice of really paying attention? Of seeing, perceiving, and understanding. Of recognizing all the revelation and profound answers we come across every day that we’ve failed to see as such. Of having sight while also having vision.

The wise heart will figure out the proper time and proper way to proceed. Yes, there is a time and a way to deal with every situation, even when a person’s troubles are on the rise.

Ecclesiastes 8:5–6

Wisdom is knowledge *applied* correctly.

How can we apply knowledge correctly throughout our lives if we are not paying attention?

So the question becomes, how do we properly pay attention to the right things? How do we see and understand? How do we listen to our day, every day, and embark on this simple, yet life-changing, journey?

The goal of this book: **To help you reclaim your own attention and create a lifelong practice of paying attention to things of worth that matter.** Let’s get to it.

*the most
successful
and fulfilled
people on this
EARTH ARE SIMPLY
better at paying
ATTENTION TO WHAT'S
important*

Paul Angone

Designed by Isabela Schielke
for Listen to Your Day

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ONE

The Epic Journey Right Where You Are

We yearn to go on epic searches for truth and treasure. Just look at popular movies and literature, not just in our day, but in years past. Yet Paolo Coelho, author of the bestselling *The Alchemist*, unmasks such a fallacy:

A man sets out on a journey, dreaming of a beautiful or magical place, in pursuit of some unknown treasure. At the end of his journey, the man realizes the treasure was with him the entire time.¹

Like the shepherd boy in his story, we come back from the long, laborious journey where we never found the treasure we were looking for—only to finally see that it was sitting right under us the whole time.

“The grass is always greener on the other side until you get there and realize it’s because of all the manure.”² I wrote that years ago in my book *101 Secrets for Your Twenties*, and I believe it’s more true now than ever.

All day we see snapshots of the entire world. Friends experiencing success of all kinds. We see the global green grass and we wonder, “Maybe I would be happier over there. Maybe I’d find my success somewhere else. Maybe *over there* is the answer.”

The allure of the unknown treasures “out there” becomes more enticing than simply unearthing the treasure right under us. You have this rich gold mine sitting beneath you, in front of you, all around you. You have treasure waiting for you to discover right where you are!

I think back to a sad story my grandpa would tell me. He grew up on a small farm in Kansas. His mother passed away when he was in his twenties, and all the siblings got together to decide if they would keep the farm or sell it. My grandpa didn’t need a second to think about the question—his heart screamed that they should keep it in the family. It was their home.

Yet, an older brother, who everyone knew was a very active alcoholic, adamantly demanded they sell it right away (as he needed to pay off some discreet debts he’d been piling up). I don’t know how long the discussion lasted, but in the end my grandpa stepped aside, and the farm was quickly sold for a steal. “Then wouldn’t you know it”—my grandpa would always laugh when telling the story, a mixture of heartbreak and justification—“a few years later they’d strike oil on that farm and become rich. And wouldn’t you know it, where would they find the oil? Under my mother’s garden.”

His mom had been digging there her whole life. But she just hadn’t dug deep enough.

Your Flavors at Home

For another example, take the documentary series *The Chef’s Table*, which follows Michelin-star chefs. Watching these master craftsmen and craftswomen is mesmerizing. But in each one of their stories, I noticed the same pattern: almost the exact same theme emerges every time. The chef would decide to go to France or

I am Massimo Bottura. I close my eyes and I want to understand where I am, cooking is about emotion, it's about culture, it's about love, it's about memory.

—Massimo Bottura, chef patron of Osteria Francescana

some faraway place to learn their techniques. Then they would create some replica version of a restaurant or menu that copied what their mentors taught them.

Then, it would all fail. The chef would burn out, head into the wilderness, and come back home with the realization that *this is where my magic is*. In their own life they would discover their own way. Their signature sauce was simply in unearthing the treasure of flavors from home.

Your Treasure Is Here

What if I told you that you've already been given the answers to your biggest questions? Your day, each day, is speaking to you and showing you so much. It's gold, I'm telling you. The problem is, we don't see it because we're not looking for it.

No, we are focused on the million "attention-demanding tasks" at hand. In today's world, we are filling every pause in our day with a distraction. A literal bear could moonwalk right up to us with a glass of lemonade, just waiting for us to take a picture to get some Instagram content that's ready to go viral, yet we don't see it because our attention is forever elsewhere.

I'm becoming more and more convinced that the most successful entrepreneurs, the most insightful authors, the most hilarious comedians, the most effective teachers and parents are not smarter than the rest of us. **I would argue the most successful and fulfilled people on this earth are simply better at paying attention to what's important**—to the things that matter to them—and then applying those insights to the sphere in which they live.

Paying attention truly is the path to becoming an expert. Experts focus on one thing through a lens that others are not willing to, or cannot, see through. They have simply trained their minds to pay attention to what matters most to them. Then they reveal the truth they see to others who cannot see.

We talk about those rare times when we experience an aha moment. I'd argue we experience these aha moments every day, we just don't recognize them as such.

So this book is not a fad, quick-hit "self-help" book that will change everything for you for about a month until I can sell you another product to change your life for the following month.

No, this book lays out a process that can change your life by changing the way you pay attention to your day, every day. This is a strategic, functional mindfulness to help you stop living an intentionally unintentional life and get the clarity you need and desire.

I will say this many times throughout this book, but we must *pay attention* to the right things. Every day you are making payments through what you're focusing on. The problem is, most of us are making payments with our attention in all the wrong places and not getting enough in return. In this distracted, deafening age, we are dangerously losing the battle for our own attention.

Why are you frustrated? Why are you anxious? Why are you excited? What is your calling? What is your path? The answers lie in the details of your day.

If you are unaware of what is going on all around you, how can you be aware of where you are going?

If you are unaware of the questions that you and your soul are asking, how will you find the answers?

If you are unaware of the time and season you are living in, how will you know if it's time to plant or if it's time to reap?

The Art, Skill, and Practice of Paying Attention

A successful life starts with a humble, curious, and acute awareness.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines *awareness* as “knowledge that something exists, or understanding of a situation or subject at the present time based on information or experience.”³

Fully living your life begins with an intentional choice to be an active participant in your day—in the magical, the mundane, and the mechanical.

Do not be afraid to pull your head out from under the blankets. I promise you the darkness there is way scarier than the light and the revelation that’s all around you.

This book is a call to walk in an awareness that leads to wisdom and revelation.

This is reimagining our lives based on the strategic, important information we are receiving every day.

We’ve lost the art, skill, and practice of paying attention.

Each day has so much to tell us, if we will only see, hear, and understand. This is a call to pay attention.

We must learn the art, science, and habit of listening to the details of our day and all the answers our day wants to tell us. We must develop a practice and a new lens to view our day through, so that we can recognize the answers right in front of us that we have failed to see.

Reading this book is a great start. The fact that something about this topic caught your eye and you are actively moving toward it says something. It really does. Let’s not minimize this first choice.

So this will not just be a theoretical book for you to read. This book is a companion in action. I will be asking you what you see *for yourself*, not just telling you what you should be seeing.

I want to help you uncover your revelation. Your revelation for your unique, amazing life. You have a purpose. You have a name. You have a path. I don’t know what that is. But you will. As you pay attention to your day and the steps I lay out, you will see and understand.

And I promise, if you start here, if you begin to form this new habit of listening to your day, you will be amazed at all the breakthrough ideas, creativity, healthier relationships, job satisfaction and growth, insights, personal development, joy, and peace you will experience.

You will no longer feel powerless, like life is just happening to you without your knowledge or control. No, your eyes and ears will be opened in ways you've never experienced before. You'll stop feeling like you're simply an actor or actress in your life. Instead, you'll be the writer, director, producer, and the talent! You'll shift from passive to engaged participant.

By the end of this book, you'll have clarity to your purpose and passion. You'll have new book ideas, business ideas, parenting ideas, and strategies in designing your day based on *your* design. You'll have healthier relationships as you learn to pay attention to those in front of you.

You can't see something you're not looking for. Now, it's time to start looking. Let's spot the moonwalking bears right in front of you. Every day we are given countless gifts of clarity. We must learn the science, art, and practice of seeing them. We need to listen to those moments when the Designer reveals to you his design.

And if you are the praying type, maybe sit and meditate on this right now as I do the same.

"Give me eyes to see. Give me ears to hear. So that I might understand."



PART ONE

The LIFE - CHANGING POWER *of* PAYING ATTENTION

Believe it or not, your whole life is influenced by what you pay attention to.

When you give your time, energy, affection, and money to whatever it is you are focusing on, you are literally *paying* someone or something your attention. Like you are giving them a \$20 bill for your engagement. Time is money, and your attention is your currency.

There is a war going on right now, more than ever before, for your attention.

Unfortunately, for many of us it feels like we are dangerously close to losing this war. We don't seem to understand how little we are paying attention, because this day and age has become so advanced in taking our attention from us. And it's happened without us realizing it, because we willingly let it be stolen.

I don't think many of us wake up, throw off the sheets, and say "All right, I'm ready to be manipulated today! I can't wait!" Yet, in reality, this is exactly what's happening.

As Vance Packard wrote in his bestselling book *The Hidden Persuaders*, "Many of us are being influenced and manipulated, far more than we realize, in the patterns of our everyday lives."¹

Packard wrote his groundbreaking, culture-shaking book about the advertising world and how sophisticated it was becoming in tapping into behavioral psychology to sell us stuff in 1957. Since then, the "hidden persuaders" have become more deeply entrenched and manipulative in the entire technological system for which we live and breathe. The Hidden Persuaders of today's world have become Master Manipulators. What they are striving to obtain from us more than anything? Our *attention*.

We must fight to pay attention. To the right things. To things of worth and meaning. To changing the way we see our day so that we can truly see it for the gift it is.

Comedian Dave Chappelle, in an insightful interview on *CBS This Morning*, described his choice to walk away from "50 million dollars" and fame, quitting the Chappelle Show at the height of its popularity. He explained why he left and detailed his journey toward physical, mental, and emotional health:

I started resting. I started paying attention to myself. I have actual relationships with my kids. I have been all over the country, touring all my life, but I never *saw* anything. Now, I've *seen everything*. . . . The way I engaged the world was different.²

In today's world we are living in the raging winds of hurry and distraction. Deafening noise. Broken windows. Muddy windows. Windows that have been boarded up for so long we no longer realize they are even there. We are constantly being told how we should be looking at the world and what specific portal we should be looking through—all in an attempt to detain our attention from looking anywhere else.

We are currently losing the battle for our own attention, but we cannot lose the war. We must take back where we are *paying* our attention. We must start to intentionally decide where our attention is being placed. Before we can see, we must begin removing the things blocking our sight. Before we can hear *anything*, we must limit some of the noise.

The main question becomes, *Where the heck do we start?*