

Maintaining Focus with a Parking Lot

Have you ever been in a meeting and while you do your best to focus on the content, you can't help but think of all the other things floating around in your life? Or someone's comment puts a thought in your mind, and you find yourself stuck on it? Sure, you have!

It's always the most random stuff too. Did you ever hear back from that person? You're out of laundry detergent. Someone recommended a book and it reminded you of that other book you bought and have been meaning to read.

While a simple concept, ensuring you always have a parking lot ready will capture all those random thoughts and keep you present where you need to be.

What is a Parking Lot?

Simply put, a parking lot is a physical space where stray thoughts, ideas, and topics are written down for future action. You're literally *parking* an idea there. This can be either a piece of paper or a digital app that is readily and discretely available for jotting down thoughts.

While parking lots capture information that floats in and out of your mind, the real benefit comes in allowing you to let that thought go. Once you've committed the idea or reminder to paper (so to speak, more on that later), your brain is free to reengage with the task at hand.

When Facilitating a Meeting

Parking lots are incredibly helpful to maintain group focus and stay on topic during meetings. Whether an in-person or virtual meeting, simply designate a person to keep Parking Lot items. This may be your notetaker or another attendee (helpful if you want more people engaged in the meeting.) You can even jokingly call them your Parking Lot Attendant, though I'm not sure they'll think that's as funny as I do!

For in-person meetings, using large sticky-style poster paper and a marker is highly effective. Not only is this a quick method to jot down items, it keeps the list visible for attendees to reference if needed.

Regardless of meeting type, parking lot items should be captured in digital notes and sent out after the meeting. Time should also be designated to address the list, whether being added to the next meeting agenda or organizing an ad hoc meeting.

Personal Parking Lot

Personal parking lots come in handy during calls, in-person meetings, webinars, conferences, reading a book, anywhere that requires your attention to consume information and participate. Similar to meetings, ensure you have a digital or physical space ready before you start your activity to jot down all the thoughts that are bound to come to you.

I highly recommend getting a notebook/pad that is specifically for capturing your notes and thoughts, so they live in one place. Make a habit of having it available throughout your entire day so you can discretely make a note without further distracting yourself (or others!)

Once your task is finished, take time to review your parking lot and use the One-Touch rule to address items on the list.

The One-Touch rule means following the 3 D's – Do, Delegate, or Delete. Set time aside to finish tasks, schedule time to finish the tasks later, or simply cross items off the list that no longer seem like a good idea.

One More Thing...

Whatever you do, don't let a parking lot age. The longer you let the list sit, the less likely you are to address items on it. Make a practice of reviewing the parking lot immediately following the activity or as soon as possible. If you don't do anything with your parking lot, all you have is a list of woulda-shoulda-couldas and ultimately, have just made more clutter in your life/work.

Happy productivity!