

A large white question mark is positioned on the left side of the slide. The background features a soft, hazy landscape of mountains under a warm, golden sunset sky. The overall tone is inspirational and contemplative.

Making It Happen!

Shifting Your Focus from Something Else to **It**
Jones Loflin & Todd Musig

See if this sounds familiar. You're trying to focus on a task at work, but **It** just won't leave you alone.

It seizes some significant mental real estate and prevents you from being fully present in the moment. You attempt to suppress your thoughts about *It* with countless less important activities, but *It* simply won't leave. You hope to escape being a mental hostage to *It* when you are spending time with your family or friends, but still *It* hangs around, diminishing your ability to enjoy these moments, as well.

Its presence, however, can most strongly be felt when you are trying to rest. You want to physically, emotionally, and mentally relax from the break-neck pace of the day, but thoughts of *It* keep robbing you of these much needed moments of sacred idleness.

"What is this all powerful *It*," you ask? Simply put, *It* is your most "Important **T**hing." Those tasks, activities, goals, dreams, and plans that are neglected almost daily in the overwhelming world of working on "something else." You don't consciously try to avoid *It*. You really want to work on *It*, whether it will take five minutes, five months, or five years, but you aren't for many reasons.

Some of those reasons may be:

- “You are so busy making a living that you forget to make a life.” (Dolly Parton)
- You get caught up in the “thick of thin things” and forget about what truly is important.
- Allowing someone else’s priorities to always take precedence over yours.
- You focus so much on the process or means to the end of doing things that you overlook the more important question, “Why am I doing this?”
- You are working on “good things.” But are you working on the “best” or most important things for you?
- A dearth of critical resources like patience, effort, and insight, due to always focusing on something else.

You may have also falsely convinced yourself that you can get it ALL done. You use the latest smartphone, get numerous electronic notifications each day to keep you in the loop, and schedule every waking (and sleeping) minute. But let us ask you a question: In the struggle to get it ALL done, what’s NOT getting done? We will wager that it is an *It*, an important thing related to your career, relationships, or your personal well-being.

Your lack of focus on *It* is dangerous. You are missing opportunities to deliver your best efforts at work. Your family is suffering from your inability to really engage with them, and you may even be shortening your life because you just won't pay attention to *It*.

You may be wondering how your work and life came to be filled with so many “something elses” and few *Its*. To better understand the reason, picture in your mind a mental funnel that you take with you everywhere you go. Your funnel is determined by your education, experiences, and environment—representing all possibilities that exist for you. This funnel helps you capture all of the things you could do or become. Poured into this funnel are a variety of opportunities, tasks, dreams, big ideas, and plans. Your daily interactions and activities affect what goes into it: what your parents expected of you; your plans when you finished high school or college; the thoughts you have about starting a new business; working in a large organization; volunteering for causes; doing something creative; building your own home; or selling everything and moving to New Zealand to raise sheep. All flow into your funnel.

Because a funnel narrows at the bottom, all of these possibilities vie to become *It*. In other words, you only have so many hours in the day. So, without a structure or process to manage all those possibilities, you struggle to determine what is important, urgent, or unnecessary. “That’s my world,” you might say. “Every day is full of a million things I could do.” And how you determine what actually comes out of that funnel and gets DONE may be one cause of your dilemma.

Not having a plan and “flying by the seat of your pants” may also be contributing to your failing to work more consistently on *It* If you don’t create a plan (and follow through with it) to tackle your priorities, something else will flow in to fill the void. We call this the Law of the Vacant Lot: if you don’t plan for and act on how you will use a vacant lot, nature or other elements will move in and make those decisions for you. Weeds grow, trash accumulates, and unwanted creatures may even begin to make your vacant real estate their home.

Skeptical? Ask yourself this question: When was the last time that you sat down and wrote down your goals and dreams? Personally? Professionally? As a family, team, or organization? You might have jotted down or thought of a few resolutions around New Year’s but goal setting has become a lost art. Whether planning your life or how to use the next 8 hours, the same principle applies. If you don’t determine the most important use of your time and act accordingly, something less desirable will consume it.

*“You are missing opportunities to deliver your best efforts at work. Your family is suffering from your inability to really engage with them, and you may even be shortening your life because you just won’t pay attention to **It**.”*

It's Time to Make It Happen!

Is the value of *It* becoming clear? Think of the difference it would make if you identified the most important of the possibilities facing you in every moment of every day and worked to accomplish the resulting *It*. Okay, “every moment” may seem a little unrealistic, but what if you were able to increase your focus on the important by 20 to 30 percent. Wouldn't that make a difference in what you accomplish?

Sam Nunn, the former US senator from Georgia, wrote, “You have to pay the price. You will find that everything in life exacts a price, and you will have to decide whether the price is worth the prize.” The question for you is: What price are you paying for allowing things of lesser importance to dominate your schedule instead of spending more time on those tasks, dreams, goals, and people who are most important to you?

If you are serious about making *It* happen more often in your work and life, we urge you to start doing the following things every day:

Define It. Start your journey by stopping. In the face of distractions and the rush to get things done, the *Its* often get buried or forgotten. Take some time to honestly reflect on all the possibilities that exist in that mental funnel we mentioned earlier BEFORE taking your first action.

The typical solution for people struggling with too much to do is just to tackle the task that is most convenient or enjoyable and work as long and as fast as possible, or focus on the task that is screaming the loudest for attention. This approach would be like bailing water from a leaking boat without figuring out how to fix the hole.

Next, begin narrowing your choices by using filters. You benefit from the actions of filters every day in your car, home, and office. They limit what makes it into your environment. In the same way, use a defined set of filters to limit what you actually attempt to accomplish for a time period. Filters could be anything from your morals, values, and purpose to current deadlines, responsibilities to others, or your available resources at the moment.

Lastly, make plans to say “No” to those things that don’t align with your defined filters. You may also have to say “No” to things of lesser importance so you can say “Yes” to things of more importance.

Believe In It. What’s your motivation to stay the course and accomplish this IT? Remember, there’s a reason why you have been working on something else and not IT. Don’t just think about IT, but engage your heart as well. It’s in those moments of self-doubt that your heart—your inner drive—can make all the difference and help you stay the course.

Communicate It. We do not work, rest, live, or die in isolation. Communicating your values, goals and activities builds a framework of support that helps you in your quest to achieve *It*. They may also have a perspective that makes your path to accomplishing *It* more clear or efficient.

As you plan your discussions with others about your work on *It*, don't forget to ask yourself these three questions:

- ① What's in *It* for them?
- ② Why should they be excited about *It* for me?
- ③ Why should they be excited about *It* for themselves?

Who knows? Your willingness to share your own story about wanting to achieve *IT*, and not settle for working on something else, may encourage others to have confidence that their own *IT* is achievable. And think about what your workplace and community would look like if everyone was serious about working on their *Its*.

Plan for It. Even with a clear *It* in mind, you will struggle to accomplish your most Important Thing without first developing a plan. Start by building your plan around commitments you already have in place. You never work on *Its* completely removed from the real world. Take the time to write the steps or process that it will take to accomplish *It* instead of just thinking about them. This also gives you something to check off and celebrate when you have taken care of the small *Its* in pursuit of the bigger *It*. “How do you eat an elephant? One small ‘*It*’ at a time.”

Spend some time determining when you will work on *It*. When do you have the physical, mental, and/or emotional energy most readily available? Do you have it scheduled as consistently as an important meeting? Remember *It* is important and should be scheduled first and not last.

And don't leave the planning stage until you have identified incentives or rewards into your plan. How can you treat yourself for accomplishing *It*, or even a small portion of *It*? Plan on how you will celebrate with others who helped you accomplish *It* as well.

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to achieve It.*

Doing It. All the planning in the world is useless if you don't execute on that plan. To accomplish *It* and accomplish *It* well requires that every resource you have at your disposal be aligned with *It*. What are the distractions around you that could inhibit your ability to stay focused on *It*? Remove them or remove yourself from them when possible. Resist the urge to multitask. It lures you into a false sense of productivity, masking the fact that neither the *It* of the moment or something else is getting done... or done well.

Celebrate After Accomplishing It. You know what needs to happen now, right? A celebration!!! Working on and accomplishing *It* is a rare occurrence in the workplace (and life) today, and you need to take a moment to reward yourself. You resisted the temptation to fall back and work on something else of lesser importance. Enjoy the moment! And those others who made accomplishing *It* possible? Include them in the celebration and the rewards as well.

Once the glow of the moment begins to fade, it's time to take note of what you learned in your journey to accomplish *It* and determine how you can apply these insights to your next *It* journey.

Finally, it's time to determine what your next *It* should be. Go back to the funnel, review your filters, make a plan and get to *It*. Any moment not working on *It* is wasted working on something else.

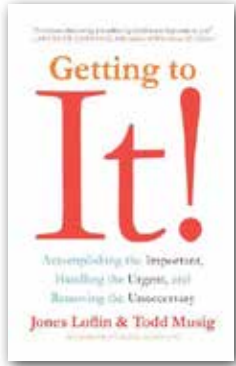
A Final Word About *It*. If you think we seem a bit passionate about *It*, you're right! In our work with corporations, we see so many organizations struggling because their people don't really care about the ebb and flow of each crisis du jour, which are often never completely resolved, and they're content just to collect a paycheck. We have observed leaders who won't lead because they know the **Important Thing** for their department would require too much risk, unwelcome collaboration, unrewarded commitment, and overall uncertainty. They simply want to enjoy the serenity of their corner office. Or, we see individuals and organizations that are so busy trying to do and be everything that they burn out or don't accomplish the right things that would bring about success.

Our hearts have been saddened by parents who say they value close relationships with their children, but then they allow themselves to drift into isolation because developing those relationships is hard work. And people who never know the joy and excitement of a life focused on *It*, but who succumb to fear that manifests itself as anger, regret, depression, loneliness, or mere idleness.

We do think *Its* are important. We want you to make *It* happen as often as possible, and to help others work on their *Its* as well.

What Important Thing is waiting on you? 📖

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Jones Loflin is an internationally-recognized speaker, author, and trainer, and the coauthor of the award-winning book *Juggling Elephants*. For over nineteen years he has developed and delivered solutions for many Fortune 500 companies in the areas of time management, focus, motivation, change, and work-life balance. Todd Musig is a senior training industry executive, consultant, and author with extensive experience in marketing and business operations. He has worked with such authors as Hyrum Smith, Stephen Covey, and Dr. Spencer Johnson, and he is the coauthor of the award-winning book *Juggling Elephants*.

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