

Relying heavily on multitasking can prove taxing

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When was multitasking born? About the same time the switch from typewriters to computers took place.

The conversion gave people extra minutes as technology started performing tasks for them, like waiting for printers to produce pages or for microwaves to heat a meal. And those periods of time -- however short they may be -- became opportunities for people to be more productive.

"Every place we turned we were invited to multitask," work-life balance expert Jeff Davidson said. "And now it's culturally pervasive if you're not doing two things at once, you're somehow less than worthy."

The perception is that multitasking produces more results, but Davidson said many times this is not true.

In some instances of multitasking, there is a net gain of time, like when eating while watching TV. But when the tasks both require sharp attention, mistakes can be made that cancel out the time that was supposed to be saved.

"The dangers of consistently multitasking are never feeling as if you are totally in control of what you're doing ... and it's internally stressful," Davidson said.

Perception of time speeds up when working on a number of tasks at once, so eventually the hours roll into days, the days roll into weeks, and the weeks roll into months.

"One day you wake up and realize you have crossed the line between human being and human doing," he said.

But in an eat-fast, walk-fast, talk-fast and sleep-less society, where employees are encouraged to work long hours and sacrifice social lives, it is challenging to not feel guilty or fearful of not doing at least two things at once.

Breaking the habit is not easy, but experts say it is possible.

Davidson said it takes prioritizing and planning to focus on a single task. And if the environment is cleared of distractions it will make it even easier.

"Try the art of doing one thing at a time a few times a week," Davidson said. "You'd be amazed sometimes of how rewarding it can feel."