

BUT BAD FOR PEOPLE

by Jeff Davidson

Chances are you worked on a personal computer (PC) sometime in the last 48 hours. While you were working with wordprocessing software, you may have also been engaging your printer, and you might have called for a pop-up spread sheet or calendar item and so forth. From the notebook size that sit on your lap during plane flights to the large Cray supercomputers, in general, computers are well equipped to handle more than one task at a time; human beings, however, are less so. When you are working with your PC, trying to answer the phone, trying to open mail, trying to respond to the FAX machine, someone's sticking their head in your door, and whatever else you can add to this list, and you attempt to entertain them all, you are attempting to engage in multi-tasking. Unlike the computer, you're going to do a bad job at it.

All things considered, human beings work best when they handle one thing at a time. On many levels, you probably already know this, but when is the last time you actually practiced it? Probably not recently. It's all too easy to fall into the trap that so much is expected of me, I have to double and triple-up on activities. Moreover, every message in our society seems to say that it's okay to double-up and even triple-up. We see advertisements of people wearing walkmans while they jog, talking on the phone while they watch television, eating while they are reading, and so forth. Bob W., age 42, works for a large brokerage firm in the International Square building in Washington. He is friendly, successful and always in a rush. He talks fast, moves fast, eats fast, and he never lets up. Bob is hooked on multi-tasking.



HEY, WHERE DID YESTERDAY GO?

Many Americans, particularly executive-types and career climbers, suffer from a misdirected sense of urgency stemming from far too many tasks and responsibilities. Certainly, it is appropriate and fitting at specific times to work more quickly than normal. It is a problem however when it becomes a standard operating procedure. Whether at the workplace or at home, attempting to multi-task ensures that you will miss your day, your week, and ultimately your life. I know people who are 40 years old who can't remember where their thirties went, and people who are 50 years old who can't remember where their forties went.

The false economy of attempting to do two things at once is almost ingrained in our cultural consciousness that seemingly rewards the

workaholic, the 16-hour a day entrepreneur, the "super" mom, and the hyper-energetic high school student. Any time you have to undertake original or creative thinking; work with numbers, charts, or graphs; or write, copyedit, or proofread; diverting your attention is bound to result in far less than your best effort and often leads to costly errors. What's more, the mental and psychic toll you place on yourself in attempting to multi-task, can be harmful.

Just for today, give yourself the benefit of working on one thing at a time. You may have to switch gears, such as when the boss comes in, the important phone call comes through, or you receive a fax that has to be acted on right away, but when you switch gears, switch them entirely: give your complete and undivided attention to the pressing issue at hand. All told, this is the most effective way to work and you'll be your happiest.

If you notice yourself falling into patterns that resemble multi-tasking, try these solutions:

- Take a 15-minute break once during the morning, once during the afternoon.
- Don't eat at your desk, get away so that you can recharge your battery.
- Invest in equipment/technology that offers you a significant return, i.e. pays for itself within one year or less, and saves at least two hours a week of your time.
- Furnish your offices with plants, pictures, and art or decoration that inspires creativity and whole-brain thinking.

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MULTI-TASKING IS FINE FOR COMPUTERS,