



Master the art of doing one thing at a time

Every day, you all engage in the process of multitasking — doing more than one thing at a time.

Multitasking is inherently complex.

To become a master of doing one thing at a time, which is inherently more simple, pick an activity that you enjoy and that offers a high probability of being engaged in without doing anything else.

It might be driving your car with the radio off, reading in your favorite armchair without having any munchies, or having music on in the background — any number of things.

- If you're trying to engage in reading, conceptual or breakthrough thinking, or creative problem solving, find as quiet a place as possible.

The old argument you gave your parents when you were studying in high school, about the radio helping you to do better, is for the birds.

- If you're surrounded by various types of tasks competing for your attention, identify the one that's most important to tackle and stay with it until completion, or for as long as you can. If you're temporarily pulled away by something else, return to the important task at hand, and again stay with it to completion, or for as long as you can.

If you've ever noticed airline reservation attendants in the middle of a pressure situation, you know what I mean.

Suppose the plane is going to be leaving in a matter of minutes, and sev-

eral passengers have arrived late. Rather than trying to deal with three or four passengers at the same time, the ticket agent deals with one person and ticket situation at a time, often not even raising his head from the computer monitor. He is making sure all the digits on the ticket he's working on will be correct once it's printed.



Success in the Workplace

Jeff Davidson

The same observation can be made of a bank teller, a good bus driver, or a construction worker walking on scaffolding five stories above the ground.

- Initiate personal balancing techniques. Take deep breaths, stare out the window, envision yourself tackling the situation easily, or close your eyes for a few seconds before confronting the task again.

- Observe the people in your organization who concentrate well. What do they do different than the rest? Talk to them, learn from them.

- If it's necessary, bring earplugs to work. Use a sound screen if it helps.

- Let others in on your crusade to increase your powers of concentration.

When it's OK to double up activities

You need to disengage in multitasking far more than you know. Sometimes it's perfectly permissible to do more than one thing at a time, however. Most of those times occur away from work.

Obviously, at dinner with a friend or loved one you'll be talking and eating simultaneously.

Generally, it's okay to drive and lis-

ten to the radio, cassettes, or CDs. The exception is when the decibel level is so high that your concentration is impaired.

The issue becomes foggy when it comes to using a cellular phone, or smoking. Both have the potential to diminish your concentration; and hence increase the probability of your being involved in an accident.

Some people argue that cell phones come with speakers so that you can keep both hands on the wheel.

The problem with being engaged in conversation and performing multi-tasks is that speaking requires far more brain activity than the passive act of listening to the radio or a CD player.

If you insist on engaging in conversations with your cellular phone while in the car, perhaps it's best for you to pull off to the side of the road.

Exercising with a walkman is not a terrible idea, but it's not the greatest.

I was at my health club recently and was bemused to see a lady who was not only on the stair climber with a walkman, but she then opened a book and proceeded to read. I almost asked her if she wanted to chew some gum, to see if she could do four things at once.

The physical exercises in which you engage are ideally their own reward.

Still, I know many people who use workout exercise tapes, or get on a stationary bike while watching a movie or basketball on television. It seems to work well for them, so there's probably no real harm.

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