

Stop the Rising Tide of Interruptions

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Interruptions today are on the rise like never before. A survey by Basex, a U.S. technology research firm, reveals that interruptions account for 28% of the typical career professional's workday. Worse, on average, employees have only 11 minutes to focus on a given task before encountering another interruption. Astoundingly, on average another 25 minutes are then consumed before returning to the original task, if it happens at all on that day. Other studies show that interruptions typically occur between every three and eight minutes and that once a worker is interrupted, there is an almost 25% chance that he or she won't resume the original task until the following day.

A Tax on Your Existence

How taxing can interruptions be? Interruptions make one less intelligent, at least in terms of addressing the task at hand. Constant interruptions during one's work are equivalent to a decrease in 10 IQ points — roughly the effect of missing an entire night's sleep.

While multitasking might be in vogue, no evidence supports that people are able to offer their best effort when juggling two or more tasks, as the juggling itself represents continual mini-interruptions. Moreover, simply working in an environment where the fear of interruption lingers prevents people from offering their best effort. Often it inhibits individuals from taking on challenges that need to be addressed because they sense that they won't be able to proceed unfettered.

When interruptions are the norm, we all tend shift how we approach tasks, and even which tasks we choose to do. The bad news for everyone is that the tasks chosen tend to be those that are less complex, shorter, and "chunkable." Such choices are fine in some instances. Invariably though, the predisposition to take on simpler tasks or to procrastinate on larger, more complex tasks isn't a healthy scenario for any career professional.

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