

MEETING PLANNING 101

The fastest way to work? Doing one thing at a time

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Here is old news: Human beings work best when they handle one thing at a time. On many levels, you probably know this, but when is the last time you practiced it? Probably not recently. It's all too easy to fall into the trap of "so much is expected of me, I have to double and triple up." Every message we hear seems to say this is OK and, better yet, required.



We see advertisements of people wearing iPods as they jog, talking on the phone as they watch television, eating while they read, and so forth. Bob W., 42, a meeting planner for a large trade association, is friendly, successful and always in a rush. He talks fast, moves fast, eats fast and never lets up. He's hooked on multitasking.

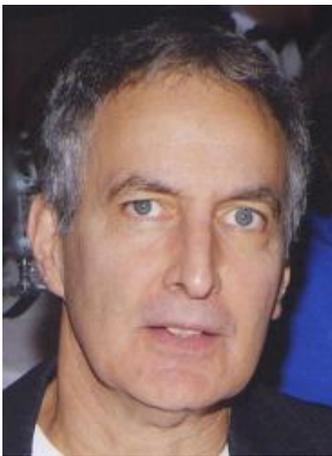
People too often suffer from a misdirected sense of urgency that comes from having far too many tasks and responsibilities. Certainly, it's appropriate at specific times to work more quickly than normal. It's a problem, though, when doing so becomes standard operating procedure.

Whether you're at work or at home, constantly trying to multitask ensures that you'll miss your day, your week and, ultimately, your life. I know people who are 40 who can't remember where their 30s went, and people who are 50 who can't remember where their 40s went.

The truth is that any time you have to do original or creative thinking; work with numbers, charts or graphs; or write, copy edit or proofread, diverting your attention results in less than your best effort and can lead to errors. What's more, the mental and psychic pressure you put on yourself in can be harmful.

So just for today, let yourself work on just one thing at a time. You may have to switch gears when the boss comes in, the important phone call comes through or you get a fax that must be acted on right away, but when you switch gears, switch them entirely. Give your undivided attention to the pressing issue at hand. You'll work better and be happier.

- If you notice yourself falling into the multitasking trap, try these solutions:
- Take a 15-minute break once in the morning and once in the afternoon.
- Don't eat at your desk. Get away so you can recharge your battery.
- Decorate your office/cubicle with plants, pictures and art that inspires creativity.
- Invest in equipment or technology that offers you a significant return, i.e., pays for itself within a year or less, and saves at least two hours of your time each week.
- Hold regular meetings with your team to discuss how everyone can be more efficient, without multitasking. Focus on the big picture of what you're all trying to accomplish. New solutions to old problems often will emerge, and activities that seem urgent can be seen from a broader perspective.



Jeff Davidson is "The Work-Life Balance Expert," and thought leader on work-life balance issues. He's written 59 mainstream books, is an authority on time management and is a professional speaker, having made more than 800 presentations to such clients as Kaiser Permanente, IBM, Novo Nordisk, American Express, Lufthansa, Swissotel, Experient, Re/Max, USAA and the World Bank. He is the author of "Breathing Space," and "Simpler Living." His books the "60-Second Organizer," "60-Second Self-Starter" and "60-Second Innovator" are popular in China, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Russia, Turkey, Italy, Poland, Spain, France and Brazil. Jeff is often quoted in The Washington Post, L.A. Times, N.Y. Times, USA Today, Businessweek and Forbes Travel. Cited as a "consummate speaker," Jeff believes career professionals today are responsible for achieving their own sense of work-life balance, and supports them at www.BreathingSpace.com.