

1. What led you to write about the subject of multitasking?

I began my business career working with entrepreneurs and small business owners. I saw a consistent pattern of behavior in these entrepreneurs, myself included. As a group, we found it difficult to follow through on things we needed to do and we were always starved for time. I noticed that one of the most common characteristics of entrepreneurs is they have the tendency to jump from task to task and even from business to business. This book contains combinations of stories from executives and business owners I have worked with over the years and the solutions I developed to help them.

2. Why is multitasking a waste of time?

I like to use an economics and finance term to describe the waste of time; the term is *switching cost*. Switching cost usually refers to the cost in time and money of switching from one provider to another. In the case of multitasking, people feel they are doing multiple things at the same time, but they are not. The brain is incapable of focusing on multiple tasks at the same time. When people attempt to multitask, what they are really doing is switching rapidly back and forth between tasks. This is why I prefer to refer to multitasking as *switchtasking*. It is these switches that cause people to lose time. In this way, switchtasking causes us to be exponentially less productive.

3. Does multitasking ever work?

Along with redefining multitasking as switchtasking, I like to point out what I call *background tasking*. Background tasking is when you do something mindless and mundane in the background. Examples of background tasking include starting your copy machine on a large print job while you answer email, or watching TV and exercising at the same time. Background tasking is actually a fairly efficient way to operate. However, when most people refer to multitasking, they are referring to doing two or more things at the same time that require simultaneous attention, such as answering email and talking on the phone at the same time, or surfing the Internet and having a conversation with a co-worker at the same time. This is switchtasking and is always less efficient.

4. Has technology contributed negatively or positively to our multitasking?

Technology isn't the culprit. It is our lack of understanding of how to use and deal with the technology we have that is the problem. In a sense, technology has evolved rapidly, but we as the users, have evolved slowly. We are dealing with productivity and time management issues that didn't even exist twenty years ago. This requires learning a whole new set of skills and a completely different mindset on how we approach using technology. It is important for us to remember that technology is the servant and we are its masters. We do have the ability to turn off our cell phone or to turn off email or text message notifications. Amazingly, most people don't realize that.

5. Are there any groups that are more affected by multitasking than others?

Business owners, CEOs, and entrepreneurs are probably the most affected group when it comes to multitasking. This is because, as a group, they wear many different hats. Therefore, they have a higher likelihood of switching back and forth between tasks, or switchtasking.

Another group I see affected strongly by multitasking are sales reps. Sales reps actually are a unique case because they are typically high energy individuals and have the tendency to jump around from task to task.

Of course, one large group I have seen strongly affected by the myth of multitasking is women, particularly because women are faced with many different challenges at the same time, especially if they are trying to juggle work and family together.

6. How much is multitasking costing businesses?

A study by Basex Research in New York found that the average knowledge worker loses 28% of their day due to interruptions and the recovery time associated with interruptions. I prefer the terms switching and switch cost, but the results are the same. Basex most recently estimated this loss costs the US economy \$900 billion. I find that number overwhelming for the average person to comprehend, so I put it this way: take your paycheck after taxes; now slice another 28% off of it. That is how much productivity

and very real value both you and your business are losing from switchtasking.

7. Are women really better multitaskers than men?

The inefficiency of multitasking or switchtasking is true regardless of gender or age. Part of the myth of multitasking is that women can multitask and men cannot, when in fact the research doesn't substantiate this. While women do have a higher likelihood of looking at problems holistically and men seem to be more single-minded, this doesn't address the issue of a lack of productivity when someone engages in multitasking. When you switch back and forth between tasks, no matter how fast you do it, you are losing time in the transition. So when someone says they are a "good multitasker," what they are really saying is they are very good at doing things in a less efficient way.

8. How does multitasking affect relationships?

Perhaps the greatest damage that comes from multitasking can be seen in the impact it has in our relationships with others. If you want to be less productive on your own terms through multitasking by surfing the Internet and answering email and jumping around from item to item within your office, you are going to hurt your productivity. But when you switchtask on a human being, they will be able to tell every single time. We all know what it is like to talk to someone who isn't paying attention to us. It is very hurtful to a relationship, especially if it is continued over a long period of time. On the other hand, consider the people you have talked to that you know are focused on you and are going to give you 100% attention. That makes a very powerful statement in a world that seems to be suffering from Attention Deficit Disorder.

9. Does Multitasking contribute to ADD or ADHD? So many people these days say that they have ADD.

Many people who have a hard time focusing or jump from task to task joke, "I must have ADD!" However, only around 4 to 8 percent of people have the genetic condition referred to as ADD – more correctly termed ADHD – which is present from birth and, while treatable, is permanent. Most people have a developed condition, something I like to call Short Attention Span Syndrome, or SASS. There is hope. SASS is a learned behavior and therefore can be unlearned through proper training. I've helped many, many clients overcome SASS. When you overcome the tendency to multitask, the symptoms of SASS begin to disappear.

10. What tips can you offer to help overcome multitasking?

Here are a few brief tips:

Take control over technology - Your cell phone ringer (even on vibrate) doesn't need to be on all the time. You can turn off email notification on your computer as well. Become master over the nagging beeps and buzzes by creating some silence.

Schedule what you can schedule - Set regular times in the day and week to check your voicemail and email. Let others know you will be using that schedule so they know when to expect a reply.

Focus on the person - When you switchtask with a computer, you simply lose efficiency. But if you switchtask on a human being, you additionally damage a relationship. Be present, listen carefully, and make sure everything has been taken care of before moving on.

I share other tips about productivity and time management with readers of my e-zine twice a month at davecrenshaw.com.