



## Multitasking Makes You Stupid

By SHEILA HAWKINS

*"To do two things at once- is to do neither."*  
Publilius Syrus, 100 A.D., Roman philosopher

This quote is so true. There are times that multitasking can work for you, but not when it becomes a way of life. The truth of the matter is that multitasking has become a way of life. Even our children are multitasking. Today's fast pace and work environment almost demands that we do so. We answer email while we talk or while in meetings, we talk on the phone while we drive, and so on, thinking that we're getting more done, but that isn't necessarily true. For instance, talking on the phone while driving can impair your driving more than having had two drinks. Try texting behind the wheel and you are five times more likely to have an accident.

Research shows an even worse effect in the office. One study revealed that when workers were interrupted by email, it took 15 minutes for them to get back on track. That adds up quickly. The average person gets interrupted once every eight minutes. That's almost eight interruptions every hour. Let's say that once every hour someone allows themselves to be interrupted by email and that it takes 5 minutes to reply to email and then the 15 minutes to get back on track. That's 20 minutes for every hour this happens. If it happens every hour, it

adds up to almost 14 hours every week.

Our brain is simply not wired for multitasking; it's wired to focus on one thing. We are not wired to do two independent things that require conscious thought especially when they involve different goals. Multitasking limits the kinds of information the brain can process and actually changes brain activity. When we focus on more than one activity at a time, there is a 20-30% loss in the total time it takes to complete two separate things. It ends up taking longer to do those separate things while multitasking than it would if we focused on them one at a time. We pay the price of wasting our precious time and having the quality of our work decrease.

The key to avoiding multitasking is to have control by properly prioritizing your tasks. So let's look at ways to help you prevent multitasking. Have 1-2 priority tasks per day. Work on the most important task first and do nothing else until it's done with the exception of taking short breaks to stretch or grab water or a quick

snack. Then move to the next important task.

While you're engaged in completing those tasks, avoid distractions. Turn off email notifications and whenever possible, the phone too. Set specific times to check email and to make and return phone calls. Place new items that come your way while you're working in your inbox and tend to them later. It may take a bit of time have these actions become habits, but it will pay off in the long run.

As I mentioned, there are some times when multitasking does work. If you're doing things of a creative nature, problem solving or other things that require conscious thought, don't multitask. Save multitasking for things like cleaning house or doing laundry while you talk on the phone and other low key activities. Divided attention between major tasks results in less focus on each task at hand, poor results and wasted time. Be in the habit of making the time to prioritize the things on your to-do list and sticking to only 1-2 priority tasks to complete each day. Doing so will keep you on track with your tasks, increasing your level of productivity and will keep you from wasting your precious time.

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Sheila Hawkins is President/CEO of Third Eye Group based in Detroit, Michigan. The company provides customized professional organizing services for individuals, small businesses and solopreneurs. Services are tailored to the needs and personality of the client helping them transform environments and behaviors, streamline processes, develop programs, systems and infrastructures to create order and peace in their lives. Services include home and office organizing, time management, productivity training and coaching, event planning and project management. Additionally, the company provides various workshops and products focused on increasing productivity. Learn more about Third Eye Group by visiting [www.thirdeyegroup.org](http://www.thirdeyegroup.org) or contact the company via email at [info@thirdeyegroup.org](mailto:info@thirdeyegroup.org).