

Multitasking: Trying to do more is Actually Hurting Your Productivity

Our modern office work environments are fast paced and the pressures are often great to complete projects, produce high quality work, and be our professional best. And it is a commonly held belief these days that multitasking, doing many things at once will result in greater productivity. However, we know from an increasingly large amount of research into productivity and the quality of work completed, that the complete opposite is most often the result. Multitasking actually results in you taking more time to complete each task and, importantly, results in a lower quality of work for the tasks that do become finished due to the built in distractions it creates.

When we try to multitask we force our minds and bodies to leap from one thing to another, or even three different tasks, and this leads to confusion over the facts and individual parts of each task. This “many at once” method will never permit the necessary laser like focus to complete a single task with success and efficiency.

So, I encourage everyone to stop trying to multitask! Below I offer six simple methods and tips to help create real focused productivity in the workplace. These suggestions are concrete, and based upon research into productivity. If practiced regularly they will significantly increase your productivity.

1.) Keep your environment clean for increased focus and clear thinking.

When your office, desk, and even computer desktop are clean and uncluttered it is far easier to have deliberate actions and thoughts. Being methodical and intentional is easier when your work environment is free of visual distractions. When people are in an environment with a lot of visual clutter and distractions their minds wander more and they become less focused. This negatively impacts your daily productivity.

Make it a weekly habit to clean your work environment, removing any unnecessary items that have accumulated recently. The research is consistent in this area; a clear work environment fosters enhanced productivity.

2.) Surround yourself with other busy people

Being in an office environment where others are as focused and working as hard as you are enhances the productivity of everyone. This tip is effective as when you observe others working hard, you will not want to be the “odd one out”. People report that when they are around others working hard they are far less likely to check Facebook, Instagram, or other social media sites that drain productive time during the day.

3.) Write down a “To-Do List” for tomorrow before you leave the office that day

As your day is coming to a close, reflect for just a few minutes on what you need to accomplish tomorrow. Write it down, pen and paper. The physical act of writing helps to commit the tasks to memory and engrain the thoughts in your mind. This sort of “day before to do list”, helps you recall the things you did not accomplish today and places them front of mind for the following morning.

I utilize this strategy every night to plan out my activities for the following work day, and there is no question when I enter my work environment the next morning it is refreshing to know exactly what lies in front of me for the day.

4.) Curate a list of time-saving apps

Everyone has a different set of tasks every day. There are certain apps, electronic tools, which can be utilized to enhance productivity. I find these two in particular to be terrific and they may help you to get going on this particular productivity suggestion:

- **Evernote** – This is a very easy to use and effective note taking app that permits easy and fast tracing of meeting notes. And they can be uploaded right into your computer or phone.
- **Dashlane or Zoho vault** – These are two password managing apps. Typing in every password you have requires that you recall them all, and it takes time. These sorts of apps allow you to onboard all of your passwords and delegate the app to enter them.

5.) Turn off your phone one hour at a time

Having your phone on, and next to you at your workplace is an open invitation to repeated distraction and a subsequent loss of focus and productivity. All of the notifications we receive via our phones should be silenced for one hour periods.

We all rely on our phones, and there is no getting around that fact of modern life. However, try silencing your phone or turning it off for one hour periods. Turn it off, turn it over (face down), work for an hour, and then check any notifications that might have come through. Repeat throughout the work day.

6.) Check your e-mail at specific times

This tip is closely related to number five. Far too many of us are virtual slaves to our e-mail, and those beeping notifications that a new e-mail has just arrived. However, being tuned into your e-mail every time a new one arrives is not going to enable a focused work session. Being addicted to e-mail is a problem that has been studied and is a real predicament at the worksite. The problem arises as many individuals report feeling productive by staying on top of their e-mail.

But at the conclusion of your day those same individuals often find that their to-do lists are not complete and progress has not been made on larger projects they are involved in.

Only look at your e-mail inbox three specific times that best fit your own individual circumstances. Perhaps at the start of your day, right before your break for lunch, and then one final time before you leave the office for the evening.

In conclusion, my advice is to not implement all of these proven time savers at one time. Rather, add them into your workplace routine one at a time over the course of a month or two. Changes to your workplace routine can be hard to implement, so give yourself time, but be persistent with these tips. You will note improvements in your focus and your productivity, and that is a research backed fact.

Imagine a workday where you are able to have increased focus and become much more productive. You will be able to harvest back so much extra time, and perhaps utilize it for free time or turn it around to heighten productivity even further.