

The Fairy Tale of 'Multitasking'



Napoleon, supposedly, was able to read, write and dictate a letter at the same time – in today's linguistic usage we would call him a multitasking marvel! In order to save time, many people try to accomplish several things at the same time: driving and talking on the telephone, talking on the telephone and reading emails, writing text messages during a meeting, etc. Do we really save time this way? Clifford Nass, communication scientist at Stanford University, tried to find out the answer to this question.

The opposite is true. Tests show, that multitaskers have a lack of concentration. They get sidetracked more easily and need more time for accomplishing work than those who focus on a single task. Modern brain research proves that our brain is not capable of multitasking. The prefrontal cortex, which controls the conscious processes, cannot execute several processes at the same time. The second task will be postponed until the first is finished. Sometimes this happens so fast that we think that we are able to accomplish two tasks at the same time. However, it is a fact that we work slower overall and our performance decreases by multitasking. Tests in the USA showed that car drivers talking on the telephone while driving produced more driving mistakes than car drivers with a blood alcohol level of 0.8.

Another conclusion: multitasking results in stress and dissatisfaction. The constant jumping between tasks interrupts the workflow, while a concentrated working period of time which leads to satisfaction and the release of the 'feel-good' hormone, dopamine.

Emergency Procedures to Eliminate Multitasking

- **Set up telephone time blocks:** Do we really have to be reachable for everybody all the time? Set up telephone time blocks and inform your secretary accordingly. Set up 'call-back' time blocks in your schedule.
- **Email control:** Disable acoustic and visual signals for incoming emails and set up two to three time blocks per day for emails.
- **Block workflow periods:** Set up time blocks for tasks that require your full concentration. Inform your employees and colleagues about this and don't let yourself be disturbed.

So stop multitasking if you want to work efficiently! The most common external disruptive factors which interrupt our work are incoming emails, telephone calls and interruptions by colleagues. If work is interrupted, on average, it takes 20 minutes until we are back to our original task. The time period is so long because in the meantime we 'quickly' (in our minds) accomplish other tasks.

In the yellow box you will find emergency procedures and some practical advice to help eliminate multitasking and accomplish more.

BEITRAINING[®] offers techniques and tips for efficient self-management in our training programmes **Priorities Organisation Planning**[®] (**POP**) and **Time Activity Planning**[®] (**TAP**).

Photo: aboutpixel.de / Stress © Thomas Pieruschek

Quotation of the Month

"Trying to do everything at once ruins everything at once."

Georg Christoph Lichtenberg

Consumers are increasingly demanding – many companies are not meeting expectations

This is one of the results of the 2010 Accenture Global Consumer Research, an annual research project that assesses customer attitudes towards customer service and marketing and sales practices in 10 industries among more than 5,800 people in 17 countries.



The survey also identified trust between customers and a company as a critical influencer of customer behaviour. Thus, building trust among a company's customer base represents a large opportunity.

More about the survey and the results: <http://www.accenture.com/us-en/Pages/insight-accenture-customer-satisfaction-survey-2010-summary.aspx>