

# Singletasking versus Multitasking

By Tom Reilly

## Multitasking leads to brain drain.

You're driving to your next appointment, enjoying your Starbucks Mocha Frappuccino, listening to the Stones, and your cell phone rings. You answer it. At the next stoplight, you text your inside sales support rep. The light changes, and the person in back of you honks his horn. You wave and drive off, proud of your ability to multitask. Multitasking is one of those things in life that just because you can does not mean that you should.

Researchers have studied the paradoxical value of multitasking. A group of psychologists found that multitasking reduces productivity by up to 40%. Separately, researchers are now documenting the switching costs of multitasking and have found that it can increase the time-to-complete a project by as much as 25%. Multitasking leads to mistakes due to lack of focus; unsafe acts, as in texting and driving; and relationship damage, as one dinner partner ignores the other to respond to a message.

When you direct all of your attention solely to the single task at hand, you are using all of your mental resources to create something of value. When you split your attention, the task receives only part of your mental resources. You really do not need to research this to understand the practical value of this concept.

The real problem is that multitasking is addictive. It seduces people into believing that they are indispensable. Also, it triggers a dopamine release in the brain. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that creates an euphoric reaction similar to the effects of cocaine and methamphetamine. Some people will argue its practicality and necessity in today's world. For them, I offer this advice: To reduce stress, do more of less.

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