



A WEEK IN *Learning*

ARTICLE

THE JUGGLERS DILEMA: THE MYTH OF MULTITASKING

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Imagine a bustling circus tent, where an expert Juggler steps into the center ring. With skillful movements, they begin their act, tossing balls high into the air with precision and grace. The crowd stares in amazement as more items are added to the Juggler's act: rings, pins, knives! How will the Juggler maintain control and stay focused on each item as it hurdles through the air?

In the circus of our busy lives, we might all feel like jugglers at one time or another. Each ball in the air represents a task or responsibility clamoring for attention daily. Work deadlines, personal commitments, household chores, and more all seem to need our immediate attention. As the Juggler adds more items to the mix, the spectacle intensifies. Yet, with each additional ball, the margin for error narrows, and the risk of dropping one increases. Similarly, in our attempt to multitask, we find ourselves adding more responsibilities to our mental juggling act, believing we can manage them all simultaneously. However, just like the Juggler, we soon discover that our capacity is limited. Our attention becomes divided, our focus diluted, and inevitably, some of the balls (our tasks) slip through our grasp.

Let's explore the struggles with multitasking, and uncover the hidden costs of trying to do it all at once. Further, we will discuss alternative approaches to achieving greater productivity and peace of mind.

The Myth of Multitasking

You are likely no stranger to the concept of multitasking. You may even consider it a necessity. Whether its checking emails during a meeting, jumping from one project to another, or stepping away from a presentation to take a phone call, we've all got enough on our plates to justify double-dipping tasks and time. For many of us, it may seem like multitasking is the only way to get everything done. In a landscape where several challenges compete for our attention, is there really any other way to keep all the balls in the air at once?

What if I told you that multitasking is not the solution to your time-crunch problem, but in fact, it's the cause? As it turns out, our brains are not wired to focus on more than one task at a time.



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As those tasks increase in complexity, our ability to make meaningful progress on multiple fronts, simultaneously, becomes compromised.

Dr. Sahar Yousef, Cognitive Neuroscientist, UC Berkley, has reported when we are multitasking, we're actually jumping between tasks at lightning speed. This process, called task-switching, drains our brainpower, even if we don't realize it.

"Multitasking is a myth. In reality, it's rapidly switching from one task to another, and then back again. And every time you make that switch, you pay a

'tax' on both your time and your energy. For that reason, it's almost always more efficient to mono-task: Focus on one thing and move on when you're done, so you don't pay unnecessary switching taxes."

What is multitasking?

Multitasking is when you take on more than one item on your to-do list at a time. At least, that's what you think you're doing. In reality, you're switching between multiple tasks in rapid succession, often with varying degrees of success. Most of us attempt this all the time without a second thought, but can you truly do it well? The prevailing science says you probably can't. Working on a single task means both sides of your prefrontal cortex are working together in harmony. Adding another task, however, forces the left and right sides of the brain to function independently from one another. According to studies conducted by Dr. Sahar Yousef, multitasking can actually hinder productivity and increase the likelihood of mistakes.

Multitasking Can Lead to Burnout

Multitasking isn't just making you less efficient; it can seriously affect your mental well-being. When we try to juggle too many tasks at once, our mental and physical energy reserves can quickly drain. This leaves us feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, and under productive. Feeling constantly depleted isn't good for anyone. So, next time you find yourself multitasking like crazy, remember: it's not just slowing you down, it's also taking a toll on your mental health. So, how can you get all of your to-dos done in a manner that preserves your sanity? The secret is to stop juggling.

Ways to Stay Productive Without Multitasking

Time Chunking

Time chunking stands as one of the most effective strategies for enhancing productivity and concentration. Time chunking allows you to create focused work sessions through dedicating specific blocks of time, typically one hour or less, to singular tasks or activities. This approach minimizes the distractions and time lost that often comes with the constant switching between tasks. Rather than attempting to juggle multiple responsibilities simultaneously, time chunking encourages a more deliberate and structured approach to managing one's workload. By immersing oneself fully in a single task during each time block, you can harness your concentration and maximize your efficiency. This method not only helps in completing tasks more quickly but also creates a sense of flow and accomplishment as each task is tackled with undivided attention.

Pomodoro Method

If you want a productive method for organizing breaks throughout your work day, you may try the Pomodoro Method. A pomodoro is a 25-minute work session followed by a five-minute break. After completing four pomodoros, take a longer 20 to 30-minute break. Because you're working in short spurts, you can train your brain to focus intently during these highly productive sessions. You know you have time set aside during those long and short pomodoro breaks to check your phone, grab a snack, or use the restroom, so there's no need to let those distractions creep into your work time. This strategy can help you stay in a productive headspace by maintaining momentum and avoiding burnout by creating structured periods of focused work and relaxation.

Use "Do Not Disturb" Features

Harnessing the power of "Do Not Disturb" features is like giving the juggler a break from tossing more rings into the air. For some, it's a game-changer for workplace productivity. These features act as your shield against constant interruptions, allowing you to carve out blocks of time for focused work. Just like a juggler focusing on one ball, temporarily muting notifications and alerts can create a distraction-free zone that allows for concentration. Whether you're diving into a crucial project or need some uninterrupted brainstorming time, activating "Do Not Disturb" mode can help you maintain your flow and accomplish more with less stress. So, next time you feel like you're juggling too many tasks, remember the power of hitting that "Do Not Disturb" button. It's your ticket to reclaiming control and boosting workplace efficiency.

As the circus of life inevitably pushes you into your next juggling act, remember: you can do it all, but not all at once. Attempting to juggle too many tasks only increases the risk of dropping the ball, leading to feelings of burnout and exhaustion. However, there are alternative approaches to productivity that don't rely on the illusion of multitasking. Strategies like time chunking, the Pomodoro Method, and utilizing "Do Not Disturb" features offer pathways to greater focus and efficiency. By embracing these techniques, you can reclaim control over your workload and cultivate a more sustainable approach to productivity.

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