Seven Ways To Stop Multitasking

From Jones Loflin-The Speaker With TWO Last Names

Think of multitasking like that old shirt. It probably isn't the best choice, but it feels so comforting to your brain to use it as an attempt to get everything done.

Do you have an old shirt that you just love to wear from time to time? One that is faded, has a hole or two, and may even be missing a button? You know you need to throw it out (and your family members affirm that thought), but it just feels so comfortable when you wear it. There are numerous other shirts hanging in your closet and maybe even tucked away in a drawer, yearning to be your next favorite shirt, but you just won't change.

Think of multitasking like that old shirt. It probably isn't the best choice as a productivity tool, but it just feels so comforting to your brain to use it to attempt to get things done. You even see the "holes" in your day created by skipping from one task to another and rarely finishing anything. The thought of tossing it out of your day, however, scares you because you aren't sure what you would "wear" in its place.

Here are seven ways to upgrade your "mental" wardrobe and improve your productivity:

Understand your brain. In *Why We Make Mistakes*, Joseph Hallinan writes, "There is no such thing as dividing attention between two conscious activities. Under certain conditions we can be consciously aware of two things at the same time, but we never make two conscious decisions at the same time-no matter how simple they are." You can only focus on one task at a time.

Commit to done. When possible, force yourself to stay with a task until it is completely finished. When we multitask, we accumulate pieces of these unfinished tasks in our brain as we move from task to task. This clutter prevents us from being able to think clearly and with greater focus on just one task.

If you are prone to multitasking, distractions only increase your desire to engage in the behavior.

Limit distractions. If you are prone to engage in multitasking, distractions are more likely to increase your desire to continue multitasking. One research study found that heavy multitaskers have a

Count how many distractions could cause you to engage in multitasking.

[*Click here*](#) *to learn more about the Pomodoro Technique.*

hard time filtering out irrelevant stimuli from their environment. The same study found that heavy multitaskers may be sacrificing performance on the primary task to let in other sources of information (Ophir, Nass, and Wagner, 2009).

Try this experiment: Position yourself in the place where you perform your regular work activities. What are the visual distractions that could cause your mind to wander from a defined task? Is there a mobile device on your desk that could ring, beep, or even emit a flashing dot at any moment? Are there notes you have written to remind you of unfinished tasks? Is there a stack of books or periodicals that you have been meaning to read, and just glancing at them gets your mind off track? Remember that any distraction is an invitation to start multitasking and make your brain feel more comfortable.

Use the Pomodoro Technique. You can learn more about this tool at the [official website](#), but here's a simple explanation: You set a timer for a designated period of time (Pomodoro suggests 25 minutes), and you work on a single task for that 25 minutes. When the time is up, you take a 5 minute break and then determine how your next 25 minutes should be spent. Set the timer again, and repeat the process. Eventually you begin breaking tasks down into timed segments so that you can develop a rhythm for your day. I use this system when I am in the office and have found it to be incredibly helpful. And just saying the word, "pomodoro" is fun (It's the Italian word for tomatoes).

Set up your task list differently. One reason your mind is quick to switch is because you look at your task list and see so many different types of tasks. Try creating separate task lists for different areas of your work. Break down a larger task into several steps so you can quickly move to the next step. You might want to also group tasks like email or calls. Seeing only one area will help keep your mind from jumping from one task to another.

You might also focus more on aligning tasks with a period of the day.

What price are you paying for not consistently focusing on your most important things?

-Jones Loflin

Instead of listing 20 things for the week, break the tasks down by putting them on the day/time you would prefer to work on them. This helps ease the stress on your mind because it's only focusing on one task in a given time period instead of many.

Stop yourself at the first signs of wandering. If you feel the tug of your email or another task, stop and remind yourself that you're violating a rule. Allow yourself to stretch, stand up, and to take some deep breaths to refresh your mental energy BUT don't allow yourself to start another task-regardless of how small it is.

Do what's most important first. One reason we multitask is that we are avoiding a deeper dive into our work. It's a way for us to feel busy, but not really be productive. Using any or all of the other 6 strategies, train yourself to work first on the task that would best move your work or life forward. For me, the most important activity is to get physical exercise, and so I do it first thing in the morning. At work, I tackle complex tasks like writing articles, developing content, and creating presentations early in my day. If I get those things done (and done well) the rest is easy.

What can you do to limit the amount of multitasking in you day?

Jones Loflin is an internationally-recognized author and speaker. His messages focus on change, motivation, time management and work/life blend. He is the author of three books, including *Juggling Elephants* and *Getting the Blue Ribbon*. Jones' newest book, *Getting to It*, is now available wherever books are sold. His humor, energy and audience engagement make an **impact** on every member of your group, not just an impression.

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