

The Myth Of Multitasking Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *The Myth Of Multitasking explains why doing everything at once is neither efficient, nor even possible, and gives you practical steps for more focus in the workplace.*

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Some works of art just fall victim to their timing. I think this book might be one of those cases. Published in August 2008, I can only imagine few people had an interest in maximizing their productivity. In fact, many people were zero-tasking at the time, given the global financial and economic crisis had just hit with full force.

Be that as it may, it takes nothing away from the value of the message in *The Myth of Multitasking*. Unless you're a first-time reader, I assume you're already sold on the value of singletasking. This book holds more insight why you should be, as well as lots of practical advice to implement this idea.

Here are 3 lessons to help you be more productive:

1. Multitasking isn't possible, but rather a pattern of switching.
2. You can establish two kinds of office hours at work to focus more.
3. If you want to spread singletasking, just lead by example and watch what happens.

I find this is one of the lessons I can never get enough reminders of. Let's zone in on singletasking!

Lesson 1: What we call multitasking is actually switchtasking, and it comes in two forms.

When most people hear that multitasking is a myth they think the myth is that it doesn't work. But that's not true. The myth is that such a thing even exists. As the author, Dave Crenshaw, explains, **what we're *actually* doing when trying to handle multiple tasks at once is switching between them**. We just do it so fast that it feels like working on several to-dos simultaneously.

He calls it switchtasking. The part of our brain that's in charge when we perform conscious actions is the prefrontal cortex. As long as we focus on one thing, both brain halves are engaged. Adding a second task, however, literally splits the brain in half. The right half takes care of one task, the left deals with the other. Now, both sides of your brain work independently, and they each chase their own goal and reward.

At any given point in time, you'll devote more attention to one task than the other, and whatever half of your brain deals with it wins in that moment – until you switch. There are two kinds of switches:

1. **Active switches.** You create these yourself. For example, you decide to check your email while you're still on the phone.
2. **Passive switches.** These are triggered by people or events in your environment. For example, as you're writing an email, a co-worker walks into your office and starts talking to you, forcing you to redirect your attention.

As you can imagine, both types of switches cause you to direct *less* brain power for *shorter* periods of time at the tasks at hand, which sends your efficiency down the tube.

But did you notice? We only talked about two tasks so far and we only have two brain halves. Imagine what'd happen if you threw in a third task. Yup. Chaos.

Lesson 2: Have two kinds of office hours to maximize your focus time.

Okay, so how do you prevent switchtasking? Dealing with active switches is mostly a matter of discipline, passive switches is where it really gets tricky. However, there are preemptive measures you can take to design your environment in ways that makes them less likely to occur. Here are two for when you're at the office:

1. **Schedule regular, recurring meetings with people who need your input.**
2. **Have open office hours at least once a week.**

The first way helps you avoid constant interruptions from the people you work with the most. For example, if a co-worker or secretary sits in the same room as you, they might often ask for confirmation, feedback or your opinion on tasks. If you have to write reports, answer emails or make phone calls, that forces you to make a lot of passive switches.

Instead, schedule regular meetings with these folks. When they know they'll get your full attention soon enough, it'll be easier to interrupt you less.

The second way is similar but more serves the people you interact with less. If you set up an autoresponder for your email or phone to avoid taking messages, you can simply refer to your office hours and thus give everyone in the company a chance to pick your brain – but on your time.

Lesson 3: Don't try to force singletasking upon others. Just be a role model.

There are two kinds of change in organizations:

1. Change by force.
2. Change by desire.

Of course you know the latter is much more powerful, as people chose to change with you, not because you left them no choice. This isn't just true for important values, like your big vision, but seeps down all the way into daily operations, which includes individual productivity.

Long story short, I know it's frustrating when you're the one being productive and enjoying the full benefits of your system, only to have others throw you off guard by not having their own. But forcing your system down peoples' throats is still not an option.

Establish your system and defend it. Live it. **Lead by example until the rest of the company catches on.** Give people a chance to see your improvements, so that they'll want to get their own. Grow a local singletasking movement the right way and when it takes off, it'll be much more effective.

The Myth Of Multitasking Review

It makes me a bit sad *The Myth Of Multitasking* fell victim to its own time, because it's relatable. Instead of boring instructions, it tells a story of frustration and transformation from CEO Helen's perspective, which makes it easy to understand and follow along. Especially worth it if your coworkers need a lesson in productivity 101.

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- What a study at Vanderbilt University found out about multitasking
- Why switchtasking always leads to a dead end
- An example of a good voice message for your answering machine
- How you fail to estimate how you really spend your time

- Which simple exercise you can use to show yourself how bad multitasking is in just a few minutes

Who would I recommend The Myth Of Multitasking summary to?

The 21 year old designer, who works in the media and is constantly distracted by her coworkers, the 38 year old team leader in the tech industry, who has to answer a lot of his subordinates' questions and anyone who keeps falling down the email rabbit hole.