



The Myth of Multitasking

One More Time: Multitasking is a Myth!

Learn to Shift Your Attention

Telling adults that there is no such thing as multitasking may be as shocking as telling a child there is no Santa Claus. How can this be? Most adults, professionals, parents boast about their skill of multitasking. We have even seen it often listed as a "skill" required for a job position. So how is it that this multitasking skill many strive to achieve doesn't exist? Simply put, it is impossible because our brains are not wired to attend to more than one thing at a time. To do anything really well requires single minded focus and complete immersion in a task. The skill that many deem as "multitasking" is actually the very efficient and effective shifting of our attention between tasks and senses.

Contrary to popular belief, there is no multitasking. I know this will surprise most of you but the science tells us otherwise. We cannot simultaneously do two or more tasks at the same time and do any of them well. It's not that we cannot physically do it. It's that we cannot pay attention to two or more things simultaneously. We cannot overcome the way the brain is wired. Our brains are wired to attend to one thing at any one moment and in one sensory mode. Doing any task well requires immersion in the task when it comes to attention. Doing something well requires single pointed focus on the task.

The reality is that we **are** faced with requirements to do multiple tasks in a given time. Rather than trying to do what is not possible (multitask), we should be developing the ability to facilitate rapid and effective shifting of a single pointed focus from one critical task to another. Now this will give the *appearance* of multitasking. But in fact, it is still single pointed focus at any moment but with very efficient and effective shifting between alternate tasks. What people perceive as simultaneous multitasking is actually the very efficient shifting of attention, between senses and targets. This effective shifting in sequence to one or more other essential tasks is accomplished by a set of priorities kept in order by the executive function of the brain. *"There is no such thing as high quality multitasking unless you have excellent single pointed focus (on one task only) which shifts rapidly in a sequential pattern to one or more other essential tasks in an alternating pattern according to a set of priorities kept in order by the executive functioning of the brain."* (From a communication with Wes Sime, fellow psychologist and friend). The good news is that this ability can be trained and developed. This is a skill managers desperately need in today's stimulus rich environment where constant distractions are the rule of the day!

There is a caveat to the "multitasking is a myth" statement. If you are engaged in two tasks simultaneously and one of them is automatic (learned through repetitive practice), then you can "multitask" in the sense that the automatic behavior requires little attentional resources, leaving the opportunity to expend more attention resources on the other task.

In a national survey by Apex Performance reported in an earlier newsletter, we found that more than four in five people reported that they multitask, and well over two-thirds considered themselves as being very good at it. It is interesting to note that those who thought they were especially good at it were women, aged 35-44, who earned more than \$75,000 per year, and have completed post graduate education. It is our experience as well, that women are better at effectively shifting their attention and making quicker decisions. Intuition may be a factor here. Recent research on how the heart and brain are connected shows that intuition is a key decision making skill, one that can be developed in a deliberate way based on new discoveries about the brain.

The scientific evidence is irrefutable. Leaders must develop their own ability to engage in both single pointed focus and effective shifting. They must then help their people develop the same. Doing more with less is a normal expectation that employers seem to have of their employees. But 'doing more with less' does not make any sense given what we now know about attention. We are limited when it comes to doing non- automatic activities simultaneously. Effective concentration is about attending to one thing at a time, single pointed focus and total immersion. This is how good performers can become great performers.

by Louis Csoka

About Apex Performance, Inc.

Apex Performance provides performance improvement services to military units, pro and college athletes and senior executives who need to build mental agility and mental toughness. We currently work with numerous golfers to include high school, college, Q-School, and the PGA. APEX Performance provides training to deliver results on the core of leadership - self awareness, confidence, mental agility, and composure. Utilizing a combination of personalized development programs, follow-up coaching, and advanced sensory technology, APEX provides the tools and learning required to achieve sustainable peak performance.

Apex Performance is headquartered in Charlotte, NC.
Website: www.apexperform.com Phone: 704-831-5614

Apex Performance is a Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business.

Apex Performance, Inc.

For more information please contact:
Christa Csoka
704-831-5614 ext 4
ccsoka@apexperform.com

14045 Ballantyne Corporate Place, Suite 350
Charlotte, NC 28277
www.apexperform.com