

Multitasking is a Myth

Learn to Focus Your Attention

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More than four in five people multitask, and 67% consider themselves as being good at it according to a nationwide telephone survey we recently conducted.

Contrary to popular belief, you cannot simultaneously attend to one thing and do another. You just can't overcome the way the brain is wired.

Habitual multitasking may even result in a situation where you can't focus even if you wanted to. However, you can learn to shift your focus and concentration in a way that improves your ability to attend to what matters most. What people perceive as simultaneous multitasking is actually very efficient shifting of attention, between senses and targets.

The scientific evidence is clear. People can only focus their attention on one thing at a time and multitasking is not a skill that can be developed or applied. Being able to control one's attention requires the ability to direct attention totally to the task at hand - regardless of distractions. This is a key skill managers need to improve performance and productivity. When people multitask, they are actually reducing the quality of their performance in all of the things they are doing.

The survey of 516 employed Americans was conducted on behalf of Apex Performance by International Communications Research. We asked "How often do you multitask?" The responses were as follows:

- All the Time 38%
- Frequently 34%
- Occasionally 13%
- Never/Don't Know 15%



It is interesting to note that those who think they are especially good at it are women, aged 35-44, who earn more than \$75,000 per year, and have completed post graduate education. It is our experience that women are better at shifting their attention and making quicker decisions. Intuition may be the key here. New research on how the heart and mind are connected proves that intuition is a key decision making skill.

Among the other findings:

- Women seem to think they are particularly good at it, with 47% stating that they 'multitask all the time and are really good at it,' compared to 29% of men.
- The more education a person has the more they think they are good multitaskers, with 50% of those holding post graduate levels of education reporting so, compared to 28% of people who completed high school.
- Likewise, 54% of employees earning more than \$75,000 annually reported doing it all the time and doing it well, compared with just 28% of those earning less than \$25,000.
- Of those in the 34-44 age group, 52% reported multitasking all of the time, compared to 13% of those over the age of 65.

I believe that the survey findings reflect a need for managers and leaders to help employees to focus their attention and concentration. 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 when it comes to attention. We are limited when it comes to doing non- automatic activities simultaneously. Effective concentration is about attending to one thing at a time. This is how good performers become great performers.

by Louis Csoka

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