



Your Brain and Multitasking: *Why Multitasking Hinders Productivity and How to Fix It*

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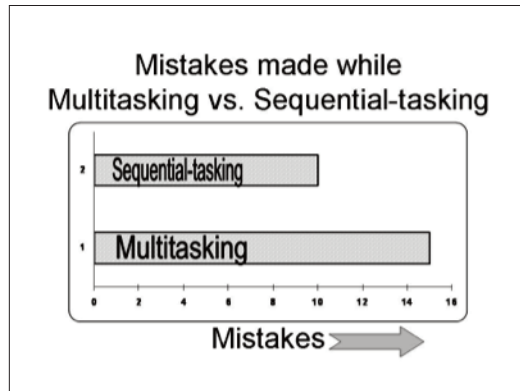
Your Brain and Multitasking:

Why Multitasking Hinders Productivity And How To Fix It!

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Do you believe you can multitask? Recent neuroscience research proves multitasking is a myth that can greatly hinder your productivity!

The human brain is a sequential processor, unable to consciously focus full attention on two tasks at the same time. Businesses praise multitasking and even create job descriptions that require employees to be able to multitask. However, research clearly shows that multitasking actually reduces productivity and increases mistakes.

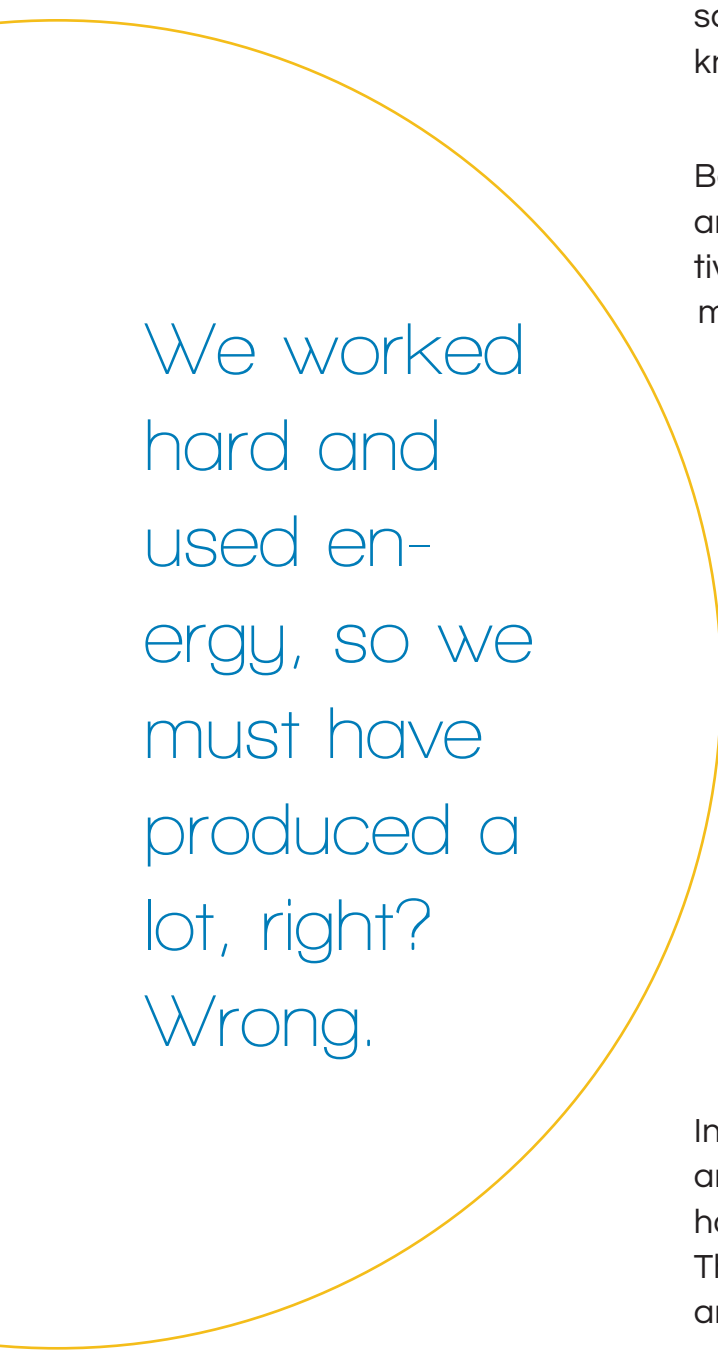


Sure, we can do simple tasks like walking and talking at the same time, but when it comes to true higher-level multitasking, your brain just can't do it. When you're walking and talking, you can't really pay attention to both tasks – this is why you will naturally pause your conversation as your feet negotiate steps or navigate around a pothole in the sidewalk. You need to pay attention to your walking so as not to fall over and hurt yourself. Your brain naturally focuses on conscious tasks sequentially.

So why do people swear they're more productive when they multitask? Like many beliefs about business functions, it is an illusion!

We have all seen the person working on his laptop with a cell phone awkwardly placed against his ear, loudly conversing with the person on the other end as his fingers peck away at an application on his

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laptop, which probably has several windows open. If challenged, he'd probably say, "I get more work done when I do several things at the same time." Does this sound like someone you know, maybe you sometimes?

Because "multitasking" drains a lot of mental and physical energy, we feel like we're productive. We worked hard and used energy, so we must have produced a lot, right? Wrong.

Another illusion is that multitasking saves time. In fact, it consumes and wastes your time. What we call multitasking is really our brains attempting to switch our attention rapidly back and forth between tasks. But every time you switch your attention, your brain goes through a sequence of activities to refocus and adjust. If you attempt to focus on a task while still working on a previous task, your brain literally stalls for at least 300 milliseconds. These "processing gaps" might only take a fraction of a second, but when repeated many times per minute, the wasted time quickly adds up.

In addition, we lose track of previous progress and find ourselves needing to "start over," perhaps muttering things like, "Now where was I?" This results in not only a waste of time but also an increase in mistakes – both of which can

damage your productivity.

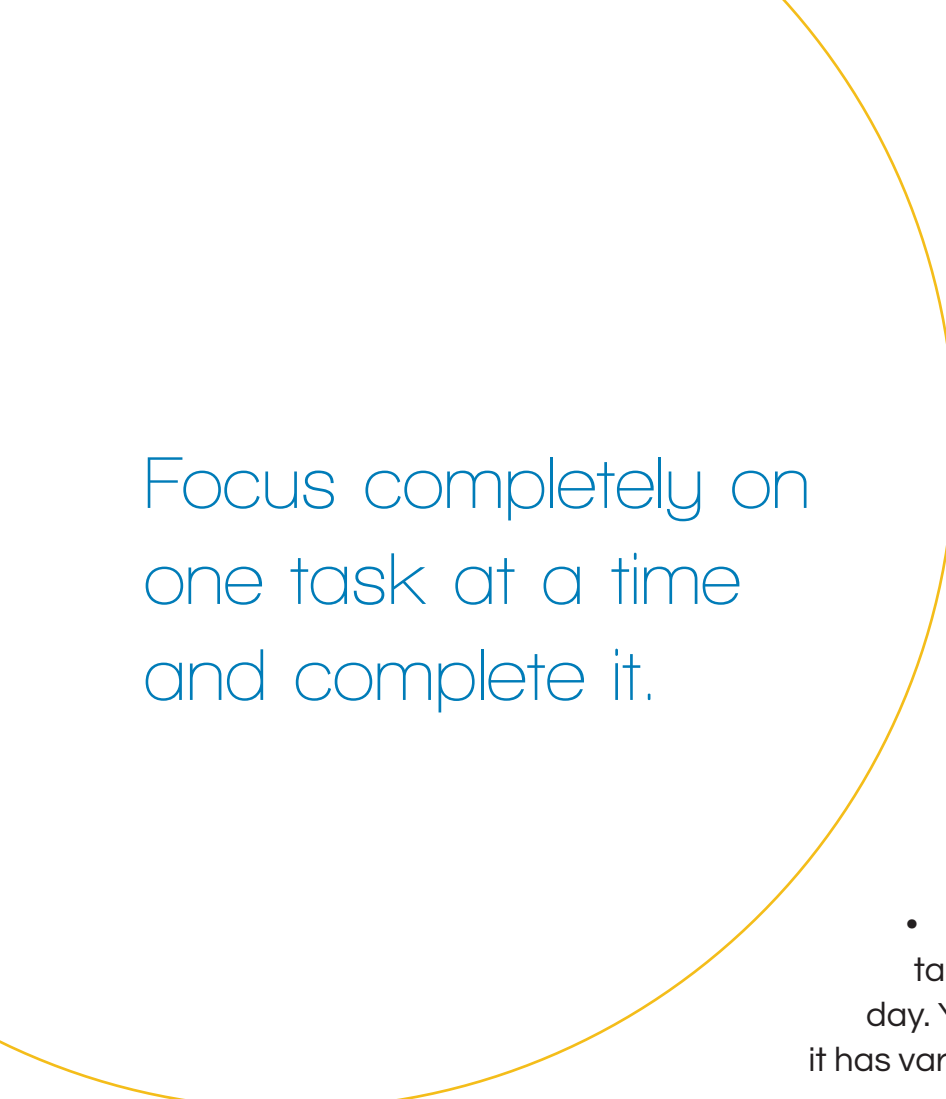
In his book, *Brain Rules*, neuroscientist John Medina states that a person who is attempting to multitask takes up to 50 percent longer to accomplish a task, and he or she makes up to 50 percent more mistakes than a person working sequentially.

Cynthia Shapiro, a human resources expert and the author of *Corporate Confidential*, notes that even though corporations say they want employees who can multitask, what they really want is workers who have “laser focus on each and every task.”

So if you shouldn't attempt to multitask, what should you do to increase productivity and accuracy?

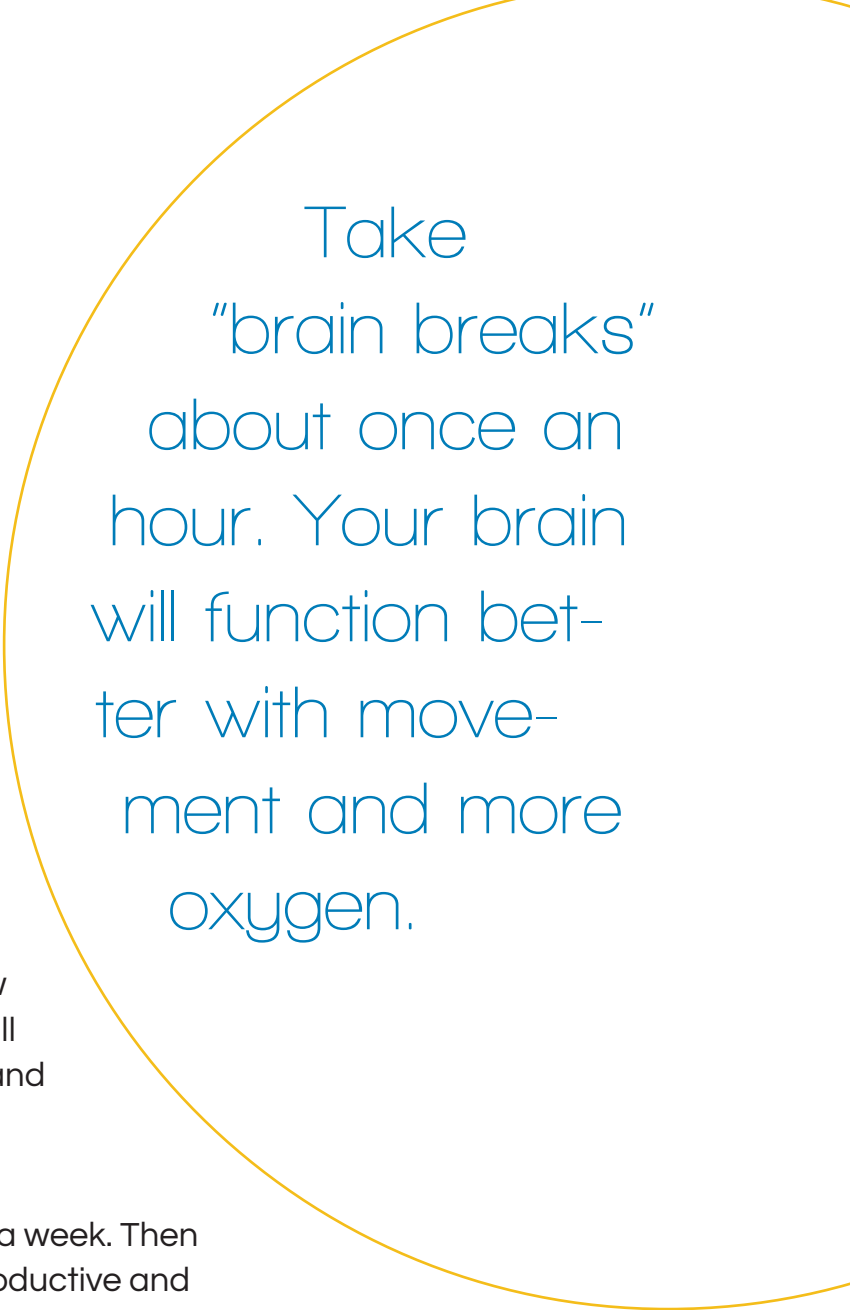
- Organize and prioritize your tasks in advance. Create a daily task schedule first thing in the morning, or last thing in the evening before you leave the office the day before.

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Focus completely on
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- Become familiar with your natural rhythms and know what time of the day you have the most energy – mental and physical. Schedule tasks accordingly.
- If possible, vary the sort of tasks you work on throughout the day. Your brain functions better when it has variety.
- Focus completely on one task at a time and complete it. Then focus on the next task. Keep repeating the process.
- Acknowledge the satisfaction you feel after the completion of each task, no matter how small the task. This will reinforce sequential task completion.
- Schedule times during the day when you will check your e-mail and voicemail – and be strict about only checking it during those designated times. This alone will greatly reduce multitasking temptations.



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- When possible, turn off your e-mail notification, phone ringer, IM program, etc. – distractions that can waste your time and give you an illusion of being productive and important.
- Take “brain breaks” about once an hour. For example, stand up, stretch, and take a few slow deep breaths. Your brain will function better with movement and more oxygen.

Perform the above actions for at least a week. Then check to see whether you are more productive and accurate in your work than when you “multitasked” – you will be!

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