

Is Multitasking Always a Good Idea?

by
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In the 21st Century, multitasking has become a way of life. At this point, every woman within reading or hearing distance is saying, “Big deal! We were born multitasking.” And it’s true, women seem to come by it honestly.



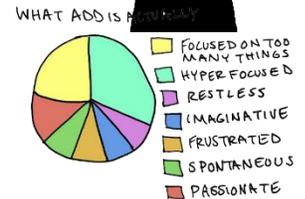
That is mainly because, in previous generations, men were the only ones working outside the home, and their duty was simply to do their job and bring in an income. Women took care of the cooking, cleaning, shopping, child raising, etc. etc. etc. In later generations, when women joined the work force, it was simply added to their duties. For men, nothing changed. Now, in our modern society, things have balanced out somewhat...I say naively as every woman around rolls her eyes while shaking her head. Well, at least in some homes and workplaces it has.



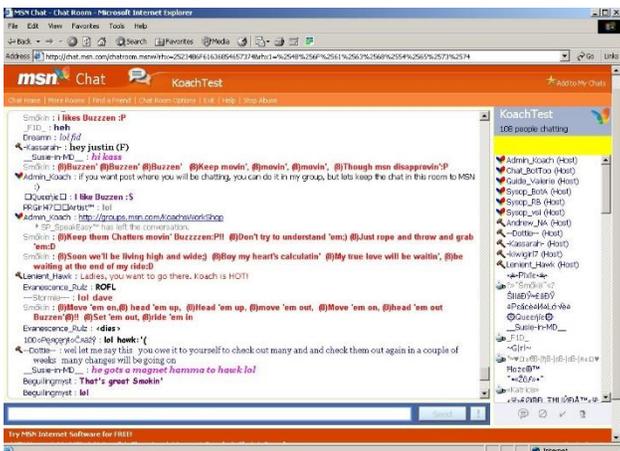
That is why multitasking comes more naturally for a woman than it does for a man. She can make dinner while watching TV, talking on the phone and helping her children with their homework, and still acknowledge her husband as he comes through the door. All in a day’s work for her. And she takes this natural talent into the workplace, where she can juggle a number of clients and conflicting projects without skipping a beat.



But, as I said at the beginning, multitasking has become the new normal. People are now expected to do multiple projects as a part of their normal work day, as well as change priorities on the fly and switch tasks on the fly, while keeping track of everything. The average office worker will talk on the phone with one client, while texting a second and e-mailing a contract to a third, all while someone is waiting in his office to talk to him. In school we used to call this ADD.



That’s all nice and good, if you can do it. Some can, some can’t; and some think they can when actually they can’t. I remember back in the early 2000’s when the in thing was MSN Chatrooms.



Still with me? A friend of mine was constantly chatting online, often in more than one chatroom at a time, juggling multiple conversations. He would not leave these conversations if you phoned, but attempted to have a conversation with you, while still holding up his end of the multiple conversations online. He wouldn’t tell you that he was doing it; you would catch on when he laughed inappropriately when you were telling him something serious, or a question from you was met with dead silence. I remember discussing this habit with a mutual friend who was a

bit perturbed with him. “Why does he do it?” she asked. “Because he thinks he can,” was my response. To which she said, “But he sucks at it.”



For some people, multitasking is exactly that way. They try to take on too much and their work suffers for it. My opinion is, do only as much as you can do well. Never let quality suffer for the sake of quantity.

In some cases, multitasking is never a good idea. Driving is one of those things where you should severely limit additional activity. Talking to a passenger in the vehicle is fine, as long as you don't talk with your hands. And if the passenger is in the back seat, please avoid the desire to look at them. Singing along with the radio or recorded music, fine, as long as you remember that you are in a vehicle and not at Canada's Got Talent. Drink a cup of coffee, sure, but PLEASE do not hold it between your legs while driving. It shouldn't be necessary for coffee shops to warn customers that they serve HOT coffee. Eating your lunch? No! Just No! Especially (and I have seen this) if you have to use a knife and fork.



Talking on your cell? You know, there was a time when I didn't see a problem with this. After all, in the 80s every second person had a CB Radio and it never caused a problem. That's how I thought, that is, until I was phoning my wife just before Christmas a few years ago, to get her advice about a present, and I heard a siren and saw flashing lights beside me. The cop advised me that I could try to fight the ticket, but what was my defense?



He was going to accuse me of distracted driving and, well, I didn't see his car right beside me. I should also mention that my call woke up my granddaughter, who my wife had just gotten to take a nap. Ask me if she had any sympathy for me.

Now texting is another matter, and my pet peeve. Where did people get the idea that they could write a letter, while driving a vehicle? Nothing frightens me more than looking in my rear view mirror and seeing a vehicle barreling towards me, and the driver contemplating their navel. Let me explain this carefully. If the task you are doing requires you to take your eyes and mind off the road in front of you, plus one or both hands off the wheel DO NOT DO IT!!! This is a bad idea to the extreme. You can't even call this

distracted driving, because you are not paying even a fraction of the attention it takes to drive safely. This is inattentive driving, there is no other way to look at it. Then there are the ones that do it at night. They have their heads bowed, their face glowing from their light of their smart phone. It looks like a cliché image of someone praying. Which makes sense, because that is what I am doing as I see this idiot coming up behind me. “Please God, don't let this lunatic kill me!”



When my phone rings or notifies me of an incoming text, my first thought always is, "If it was really a smart phone, it would know that I was driving." Maybe that will be the next App. We can hope. Maybe I should invent it.

So there you have it. Multitasking in our time. I don't expect it to go away anytime soon, so I guess we'll just have to get used to it. But my recommendation is, if you are going to do it, do it smart, and don't let your work, family, friends, or poor, unsuspecting drivers suffer for your multitasking. Until next time...

