

GET  
MORE  
DONE  
**singletasking**  
ONE  
THING  
AT A  
TIME

**DEVORA ZACK** author of NETWORKING FOR PEOPLE WHO HATE NETWORKING



You are reading an excerpt from  
**Berrett-Koehler Publishers**

Our books challenge conventional thinking,  
introduce new ideas, and foster positive change.  
If you sign up for an account on our website,  
you may purchase our books at a discount.

**[www.bkconnection.com](http://www.bkconnection.com)**

## MORE PRAISE FOR SINGLETASKING

“Zack’s system is thoughtful, simple, and practical, so it’s no surprise that it works.”

—Richard J. McAlonan, Executive Director, Ernst & Young LLP

“Zack makes a compelling case for the merits of living a singletasked life.”

—Rachel Lam, Senior Vice President and Group Managing Director  
Time Warner Investments

“Multitasking is madness—you wouldn’t want to be operated on by a surgeon who was checking her email every five minutes, would you? Devora offers simple, straightforward advice for getting far more done than you ever would hopping around like a frog on a hot skillet.”

—Deborah S. Cohn, former Trademarks Commissioner  
United States Patent and Trademark Office

“In our hyperconnected world where we fear missing out on anything, Zack delivers a message we need to hear—the key to personal and organizational success is focusing on what matters most.”

—Patrick Fitzgerald, Vice President, SiriusXM Radio

“Zack provides the artillery to slay the multitasking monster, creating wholeness, happiness, and peak performance.”

—Amy Lemon, Program Manager, Smithsonian Institution

“Zack gives us a much-needed wake-up call about the dangers of a distracted mind.”

—Jeff Weirens, M&A Consulting Leader, Deloitte Consulting LLP

“A great read while you’re catching up on email, finishing that proposal, and preparing performance feedback for your staff . . . Zack connects with her readers in a light, funny style that makes this book a delightful read.”

—Mike Brennan, retired intelligence executive, National Reconnaissance Office

“This book could save your life. Multitasking has become a fatal distraction that can ruin your health, your relationships, and your work. But now there’s a cure: singletasking. Read this intensely engaging, laugh-out-loud funny, and down-to-earth practical book now—you’ll be glad you did, and so will those you live and work with.”

—Jim Kouzes, coauthor of *The Leadership Challenge* and  
Dean’s Executive Fellow of Leadership, Leavey School of Business,  
Santa Clara University

“Don’t be seduced by the false promise of multitasking! Instead, be seduced by the insight and humor of Devora Zack, who shows you how to really make your mind work at peak efficiency.”

—**Shai Novik, President, OPKO Biologics**

“Multitasking is like trying to look in two directions at once: it seems like it’d be cool, but it can’t be done and makes your head hurt trying. Devora Zack helps you accomplish more than you ever thought possible using tips and techniques that genuinely work!”

—**David Meisegeier, Vice President, ICF International**

“I used to multitask constantly, thinking it was the only way to get through my day. After reading this book, I’m a convert.”

—**Hiro Yamaguchi, General Manager of Corporate Strategy, TEPCO, Japan**

“Zack dispels our basic assumptions that multitasking is a sine qua non to achievement and proves in a most informative and entertaining manner that focused singletasking is the true path to achieving our goals.”

—**Howard Wiener, Partner, KPMG LLP**

“Management myth buster Devora Zack’s new target is the fabled beast known as multitasking. While a one-man band may entertain and amuse, Zack’s new book repeatedly proves that the dedicated, single-task-focused individual achieves quantifiable results time and time again.”

—**Dave Summers, Director of Digital Media Production,  
New Media Stage Management, American Management Association**

“When confronted with multiple tasks that must be completed expeditiously, it’s easy to fall into the trap of believing that they all can be tackled simultaneously. Zack demonstrates (with evidence) why we’ve had it all wrong.”

—**Ann-Marie Luciano, Partner, Dickstein Shapiro LLP**

“As a customer of Devora’s services at two Fortune 500 companies, I can attest that her methods produce tangible results. Singletasking identifies opportunities for improvement and targets the right actions to bring out the best in people and organizations.”

—**Jeff Martin, former human resources executive, CSC and America Online**

“I always suspected that those who prided themselves on being able to do a lot of things simultaneously weren’t necessarily superior; this book proves it.”

—**P. J. Kuyper, President and CEO, Motion Picture Licensing Corporation**

“I thought I was supposed to pride myself on being able to do a lot of things simultaneously—but I’m too exhausted! Thanks to Devora Zack for showing us a better way.”

—**Peter Borden, Vice President, Client Services, SapientNitro**

# SINGLETASKING

Other books by Devora Zack:

*Managing for People Who Hate Managing:  
Be a Success by Being Yourself*

*Networking for People Who Hate Networking:  
A Field Guide for Introverts, the Overwhelmed,  
and the Underconnected*

# SINGLETASKING

*Get More Done—  
One Thing at a Time*

DEVORA ZACK



BK<sup>®</sup>

Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

*a BK Life book*

# Singletasking

Copyright © 2015 by Devora Zack

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at the address below.



**Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.**

1333 Broadway, Suite 1000

Oakland, CA 94612-1921



Tel: (510) 817-2277, Fax: (510) 817-2278

[www.bkconnection.com](http://www.bkconnection.com)

## Ordering information for print editions

*Quantity sales.* Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, and others. For details, contact the "Special Sales Department" at the Berrett-Koehler address above.

*Individual sales.* Berrett-Koehler publications are available through most bookstores. They can also be ordered directly from Berrett-Koehler: Tel: (800) 929-2929; Fax: (802) 864-7626; [www.bkconnection.com](http://www.bkconnection.com)

*Orders for college textbook/course adoption use.* Please contact Berrett-Koehler: Tel: (800) 929-2929; Fax: (802) 864-7626.

*Orders by U.S. trade bookstores and wholesalers.* Please contact Ingram Publisher Services, Tel: (800) 509-4887; Fax: (800) 838-1149; E-mail: [customer.service@ingrampublisherservices.com](mailto:customer.service@ingrampublisherservices.com); or visit [www.ingrampublisherservices.com/](http://www.ingrampublisherservices.com/)  
Ordering for details about electronic ordering.

Berrett-Koehler and the BK logo are registered trademarks of Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

First Edition

Paperback print edition ISBN 978-1-62656-261-5

PDF e-book ISBN 978-1-62656-262-2

IDPF e-book ISBN 978-1-62656-263-9

2015-1

Text design and composition: Seventeenth Street Studios

Cover design: Dan Tesser/Studio Carnelian

Copyeditor: Todd Manza

Proofreader: Laurie Dunne

Indexer: Richard Evans



**To my dearest reader:**

You are hereby released from  
the temptation to overachieve.

Your friend:

*Devora Zack*

P.S. You're welcome.

*This page intentionally left blank*

**Carpe diem.**

For my sons . . .

who charmingly prove the merits of singletasking,  
even under the most rigorous trials.

*This page intentionally left blank*

# CONTENTS

<b>PREFACE</b>	xi
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1
<b>PART ONE: RECLAIM YOUR LIFE</b>	9
Chapter 1. The Multitasking Myth	11
Chapter 2. The Singletasking Principle	27
<b>PART TWO: REGAIN CONTROL</b>	41
Chapter 3. Your Mind	43
Chapter 4. Your Days	57
Chapter 5. Your Interactions	77
<b>PART THREE: RECALL WHAT MATTERS</b>	99
Chapter 6. Action $\neq$ Results	101
Chapter 7. Home Sweet Home	115
<b>APPENDIX: RETORTS TO MULTITASK HARDLINERS</b>	131
<b>NOTES</b>	135
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	139
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	143
<b>INDEX</b>	145
<b>AT YOUR SERVICE</b>	147
<b>ABOUT THE AUTHOR</b>	148

*This page intentionally left blank*

## PREFACE



*My life demands that I do  
several things at once.*

*I must be fully present  
as I travel through my days.*

The successful man is the average man, focused.

ANONYMOUS

## Why Me?

---

I am despondent over my ample qualifications to write this book.

That I wrote it verifies my good will and poor judgment. Why would I voluntarily take on the task of authoring a book when more pressing matters demand my immediate attention?

Let's breeze through one of my basic weekday mornings. By 8:30 I've exercised, done a little writing at my neighborhood café, scanned the headlines, reorganized my to-do list, whizzed to the local grocery, woken and fed my three glorious (aka "grumpy-it's-a-school-day-again") sons, prepped lunches, run the dishwasher, imperceptibly tidied up, tossed in a laundry load, completed three round-trip school runs, returned several client messages, and am en route to my first meeting of the day—chagrined that the clock is closing in on 9:00.

Don't be impressed. I'm typically burned out by 11:30.

Upon arrival at my office, I'm not congratulating myself on my efficiency. No. Awaiting me is a lovely array of supremely urgent messages, meetings, interviews, conference calls, a lunchtime presentation, and a manuscript deadline. How will I ever catch up?

I won't! I am a failure. I may as well collapse facedown on my keyboard right now.

Nothing can save me, with the exception of . . . singletasking!



## Me and You

Forget about my career as an author, speaker, and consultant. What matters more is that I understand on a visceral level the titanic demands facing my readers daily—and I have a solution that truly works.

Nothing is more annoying than getting advice from so-called experts completely out of touch with the reality of normal lives:

- “Delegate 90 percent of your tasks; free yourself for creative strategic planning.”
- “Reduce your workload to fifteen minutes a day; only do the real essentials!”
- “Don’t take on any more responsibilities until your schedule opens up.”
- “Take several vacations a year to rejuvenate.”

Has your head blown up?

Do not despair. I am not one of those types of experts. Their misguided advice is decidedly not the solution to your travails. I’ve got the cure, and I’m calling it *singletasking*.

Successful singletasking means managing your own sweet self (starting with your thoughts) and your encompassing environment (including your relationships).

Bliss is a slim volume away. The remedy has arrived, in the helpful form of a fast, fun read. Did I mention practical?

I am confident the two of us can muddle through the murk and emerge brighter, happier, and more efficacious by the far end of this book’s cover.

*This page intentionally left blank*

# INTRODUCTION



**MYTH**

*Multitasking leads to success.*

**REALITY**

*Multitasking leads to mistakes.*

You would not believe how difficult it is to be simple and clear. People are afraid that they may be seen as a simpleton. In reality, just the opposite is true.

JACK WELCH

Evelyn was excited about an essay she had written for a class she was taking. She asked if she could read it to me.

“Sure! I’d love to hear it!” Then I glanced down at my iPhone. Big mistake.

I assumed she’d need a moment to retrieve her essay, and I had been waiting all day to hear the results of a recently submitted project proposal. There was an email from the prospect.

Evelyn began to read, but by now I was far away.

“Wait!” I said. Evelyn stopped.

My glance at the email had revealed that my company’s proposal was not selected for the contract on which I had spent the better part of a week. “Oh no!” I wailed. “That is ridiculous! They totally blew it!”

By now Evelyn couldn’t hide her annoyance. “Never mind.”

I begged forgiveness, tossed my iPhone facedown on the table, and convinced her to start reading her essay to me all over again.

From this, I realized two basic facts:

1. I couldn’t be a truly present listener with my attention split between Evelyn’s essay and the disappointing news I had to share tomorrow with my colleagues.
2. When visiting with a friend in the evening, it is absolutely unnecessary to check on the results of a work proposal.

## Let's Get It Started

Do you ever look at the clock upon the day's end and wonder where the time went? Are you nonstop busy yet lack a sense of accomplishment? Does your to-do list grow rather than shrink, despite your best efforts?

Please say it's not just me.

In my research for a book about singletasking, I spoke with hundreds of people. The majority reacted along the lines of "I need that!" Or alternatively, "My coworker/spouse/friend/boss/employee needs that!" Yet the idea of relinquishing multitasking turns out to be surprisingly controversial. The intensity of responses reminded me of how certain folks get revved up over politics or religion. Some people were incensed, refusing to accept that singletasking is remotely plausible. Multitasking is an ingrained cultural expectation, woven into the fabric of our times.

Consider the following response to my suggestion that a credible and superior alternative to multitasking exists: "I like the idea of singletasking but I'm afraid it's not for me. Frankly, singletasking sounds like a luxury, and not one that people in business can generally afford. Does it sound nice to focus on one thing at a time? Sure! Would I have time to sleep? I'm doubtful. Please prove me wrong!"

Got it. I will. I like a challenge.

Singletasking is not a luxury; it is a necessity. You can accomplish far more doing one thing at a time, plus enjoy sleep. In fact, increased restorative time is both an outcome of—and a contributor to—a singletasked life.

My work is further fueled by comments such as, “I multitask all the time. I have to. I wouldn’t be able to get anything done otherwise. It is impossible to function without it.”

Offering an alternative to the societal norm has never been easy. Galileo lived in an era when the Earth was widely considered to be the center of the universe. He challenged this belief, boldly attesting that the planets—Earth included—rotate around the sun. He was consequently investigated by the Roman Inquisition, found guilty of heresy, and placed under house arrest. Yikes.

That multitasking has a real following is quite the understatement. When I say it is an illusion—well, let’s face it, that’s consultant heresy. I’ll never work in this town again!

When mavericks go against the grain, two components have to be in place. First, we have to really, really believe in what we espouse. Second, we cannot stop ourselves from sharing what we know to be true.

And so, my friends, I present to you the Singletasking Principle:

► **Get more done, one thing at a time.**

Recall a time you were counting something—money, items, your pulse, or accolades—lost your train of thought, and had to start again. There are two likely reasons you lost count. One is internal: your mind wandered. The second is that an external stimulus distracted you.

The former demonstrates how an unruly mind can derail even a simple task. The latter shows how succumbing to external distractions wastes, rather than saves, time. Either way, an interruption scrambled your focus, decreasing your productivity. You'll now need to start all over on your singularly important job of counting.

This book provides a system with versatile tools to help you restore your attention to what matters most. You will learn how to manage your mind, your environment, and all those pesky people who come between you and your potential. You will gain insights that enable you to consistently finish what you begin. By immersing yourself in one task at a time, one moment at a time, you'll accomplish more while enjoying deeper, stronger relationships.

What about distractions? You'll learn how to mitigate disruptions originating in your mind as well as those meandering around your workplace.

Go ahead; let free a sigh of relief.

## **Welcome to Singletasking**

---

The themes of this book are presented in three primary sections:

Part 1: Reclaim Your Life

Part 2: Regain Control

Part 3: Recall What Matters

Part 1 provides the groundwork. This section debunks multitasking as a viable solution to a hectic life, introduces

singletasking as the antidote to our frenetic world, provides a self-assessment to determine your current approach to tasks, and explains how we got into this predicament.

Part 2 offers techniques on how to guide our thoughts, workplace, and relationships. Here we deep dive into applying the singletasking definition provided in the preface—managing yourself and your environment.

Part 3 teaches you how to rejuvenate, improve home life, and live in a calmer, happier way. This section expands the Singletasking Principle beyond the workplace.

Each component influences the others. When you refine your thought process, your relationships are positively impacted. When you take control of your environment, the day flows more smoothly. And so on. Therefore, key elements are interwoven throughout the sections.

## **It Can't Be Real . . . Can It?**

Perhaps singletasking seems a tad unrealistic. Such a concept may appear charming, yet you have more on your plate than I could possibly imagine!

Except that I'm also living that kind of life, and all the methods in this book have been created and tested by real people and really work.

When I tell you that multitasking absolutely backfires, this is not some crackerjack opinion that I've conjured. The assertions



in this book are backed up by a combination of neuroscience, globally conducted research, and cross-disciplinary studies.

Here's an amuse-bouche: switching focus lowers productivity while increasing the number of hours required to complete tasks. Researchers at Harvard University found that the most productive employees change focus relatively few times, whereas frenetic workers switch focus up to five hundred times a day.

In short, habitually switching between tasks correlates with poor productivity.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, multitaskers are more susceptible than single-taskers to interference (sacrificing performance on a primary task to let in other sources of information), less effective at suppressing activation of irrelevant tasks, and slower to focus. What researchers have dubbed “heavy media multitasking” correlates with high susceptibility to distraction and a poor ability to filter stimuli.

## **Just Do It!**

Joining the ranks of the highly productive and efficient does not require a societal shift or a global reconfiguration. You can make a change all on your own. Simply practice the accessible techniques offered here and you will learn how to consistently direct your attention to one task at a time.

I understand that temptations run high to surrender to multitasking. I have one teeny question: How's it working for you so far? And some follow-up questions, Your Honor: Does being distracted, unfocused, and scattered make you more productive,

calm, and relaxed? How do you like it when other people interrupt, seem to half-listen, or ask you to repeat what you just said? And do you check messages when in meetings, read emails when on the phone, or lack discipline when you need to concentrate?

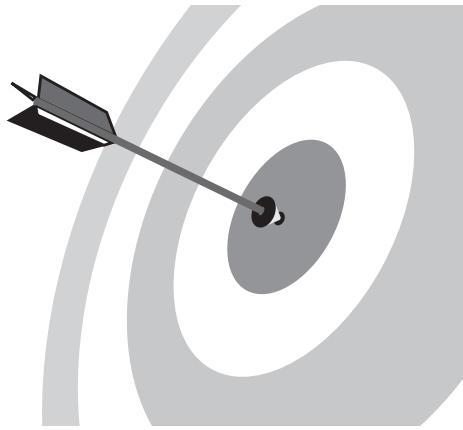
This book will teach you to be more productive, immerse yourself in tasks, and reduce distractions. This is a book that teaches you—reminds you—how to be here, now; how to live in a state of creative flow; how to stop the madness.

**Singletasking** will change the quality of your life. Take the plunge. Commit!

You can do it.

PART ONE

# Reclaim Your Life



**Things which matter most  
must never be at the expense of  
things which matter least.**

JOHANN WOLFGANG  
VON GOETHE

*This page intentionally left blank*

# 1 The Multitasking Myth

---

**MYTH**  
*I'm great at multitasking.*

**REALITY**  
*Multitasking is  
neurologically impossible.*

No man is free  
who is not master of himself.

EPICETETUS

Multitasking fails us.

Let me take that one step further. Multitasking doesn't even exist. We'll circle back to this alarming yet scientifically backed claim later.

Why are so many people drawn into the albatross of multitasking? We are collectively thwarted by modern-day plagues such as:

- Too much to do, too little time
- Cluttered life, cluttered mind
- Growing piles of daily demands
- A whirlwind of distractions

Nooo! [Cue eerie Halloween music.]

This list is the tip of the iceberg. Go ahead; brainstorm a few dozen examples of your own. I'll wait here, tapping my foot, growing ever more anxious that I'm wasting my irreplaceable time.

When you return, check out how one guy I interviewed described multitasking in daily life: "What is the impact of multitasking when looking at text messages while driving? Reading the newspaper while talking on the phone to colleagues? Watching *NFL Live* when your wife wants to talk about schedules? You run into the car ahead of you, agree to finish a project before it can possibly be done, and schedule a business trip on your father-in-law's birthday."

In a fruitless effort to compensate for the tsunami we call our lives, we try to tackle several tasks at once . . . making distracted living rampant. We lose concentration, heighten stress, and

senselessly fret over items unrelated to the task at hand. We are relentlessly disrespectful to the people right in front of us—colleagues, customers, vendors, employees, cohorts, and our own family.

Fragmented attention (aka multitasking) fractures results and foils relationships.

## **A Monster in Our Midst**

---

What makes multitasking so enticing?

We know of the dangers of texting and driving, yet many of us still do it. How can we circumvent distraction? Why is it so difficult to immerse ourselves in a single task at a time? Because lurking around every turn is what I call the multitask monster. Many are thwarted by this compelling creature.

One of his primary tricks is pulling our attention toward unrelated obligations as we work. He looms over our desks, lumbering around our workplace, two heads recklessly swinging in opposite directions, daring us to focus on one over the other. As we stare in despair at our stealthily expanding in-box, the multitask monster soothingly whispers into our ears the Sole Solution: “Tackle two, three, four at once! It is your *only hope*.”

Worse, seemingly everyone else has taken on the multitask monster as a revered guide, responding to his every beck and call.

Resist! Stop the madness! Gather your resilience and kick that multitask monster out the door. Multitask monsters are

like ocean sirens luring sailors to disaster—though notably less well groomed.

What if I asked you to banish the multitask monster for one day? Could you do it? What would stop you? Can you give it a go? What results will you reap?

One client reflected, “I’ve always prided myself on being a multitasker over the years, but if I were to do honest self-evaluation today, I realize there are pitfalls to all this madness!”

Another acknowledged, “When I do more than one thing at a time I never do anything particularly well.”

The hard fact is that attempting to multitask correlates with low productivity.<sup>1</sup> By definition, doing more than one thing at a time means you are distracted. The only way to do anything particularly well—or, let’s raise the bar, *spectacularly* well—is through full task engagement. As I heard a father sagely explain to his son, a newly minted college grad, “At any given time, you can do one thing well or two things poorly.”

## **The Allure of Distraction**

---

We are distracted. This does not serve us well.

Don’t blame yourself entirely. Cultural expectations—based on technological advances—have resulted in unrealistic demands. We are expected to absorb a torrent of information from a plethora of media without pause. We are to be constantly accessible.



Many of us react to the alarming pile of demands by splitting our focus among tasks. We are in the midst of an increasing trend toward what Linda Stone calls “continuous partial attention”—giving superficial, simultaneous attention to competing streams of information.<sup>2</sup> Living in our own personal big bang, we feel unable to keep pace with the frenetically expanding universe encircling our lives. Again and again I hear, “The more I try to keep up, the more overwhelmed I become.”

A slew of people suffer from the misconception that multitasking is necessary to cope with task overload. This always backfires.

Multitasking is misleading. Rather than mitigating demands, it magnifies our problems. Our brains are incapable of honing in on more than one item at a time.

Multitasking blocks the flow of information into short-term memory. Data that doesn’t make it into short-term memory cannot be transferred into long-term memory for recall. Therefore, multitasking lowers our ability to accomplish tasks.

We are losing our ability to focus. We are scattered. We are impolite. We cause—and suffer from—accidents. We are unproductive. We relinquish control. We pretend to multitask.

Why did I say “pretend”? Because multitasking doesn’t exist! I’ll keep sneaking in this factoid until you’re ready to hear it. It’s make-believe! Think Zeus throwing lightning bolts. Or Casper the Friendly Ghost.

## Everybody Loves a Neuroscientist

As any neighborhood neuroscientist will attest, the brain can only focus on one thing at a time.

Allow me to expand. The brain is incapable of simultaneously processing separate streams of information from attention-demanding tasks. What we conversationally reference as multitasking is technically called task-switching—moving rapidly and ineffectively among tasks.

As Dr. Eyal Ophir, a neuroscientist at Stanford University, explains, “Humans don’t really multitask, we task-switch . . . switch[ing] very quickly between tasks.” Although this feels like multitasking, the brain is incapable of focusing on two things at once. Plus, performance suffers as attention shifts back and forth.<sup>3</sup>

Not only that, get a load of this from Dr. Earl Miller at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology: “You cannot focus on one [task] while doing [an]other. That’s because of what’s called interference between the two tasks. . . . People can’t multitask very well, and when people say they can, they’re deluding themselves. The brain is very good at deluding itself.”<sup>4</sup>

To recap, actual multitasking is not possible, and what is commonly labeled as multitasking is really task-switching. We task-switch within tenths of a second; we don’t consciously notice delays. So from here forward I will alternatively reference multitasking as task-switching, “attempts to multitask,” or “so-called multitasking.” Occasionally I’ll just say multitasking, although you and I both know that is just shorthand. Most defenders of multitasking do not have a grasp of its actual

meaning. I don't intend this as a slam. Multitaskers are only halfway paying attention to what I'm saying anyway.

Even electrical synapses short-circuit over so-called multitasking. As one client shared with me, "I met up with my boss as I walked in this morning. He was talking to me as I entered my PIN into the door lock. I said to him, 'I can't multitask,' meaning I couldn't listen to him and enter my number at the same time. He told me multitasking also backfires in the context of electrical engineering, the way circuits are designed. If you try to make a circuit do more than one thing, its efficiency is reduced."

My client's boss has a doctorate in electrical engineering. In fact, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word *multitasking* is derived from computer processing, emerging in the English lexicon at the time of the first computer.

**Multitasking:** [noun] 1. Computing simultaneous execution of more than one program or task by a single computer processor. 2. Handling of more than one task at the same time by a single person.

Replacing rapid-fire shifts with attention on one task at a time enables us to achieve more in less time. We wind up ahead.

## When Multitasking Isn't Multitasking

Some folks angrily retort, "I can hold a conversation and empty the dishwasher. I can listen to the radio and drive! That's multitasking."

Allow me to begin by saying that I admire your feisty spirit. That said, Dr. David Meyer can clear things up: “Under most conditions, the brain simply cannot do two complex tasks at the same time. It can happen only when the two tasks . . . don’t compete with each other for the same mental resources.”<sup>5</sup>

Multitasking means combining two or more activities, potentially causing at least one to receive inadequate attention. Activities that require virtually no conscious effort can be performed in conjunction with primary tasks and do not fall in the bandwidth of multitasking. “Simple” tasks are automated, low-level functions, including rote activities that do not require concentration.

Engaging in two unrelated tasks at the same time when at least one does not demand conscious effort is not multitasking. Activities in this category vary based on one’s experience and surroundings. For example, driving to the local grocery store is a basic, mundane event for many, yet a new driver must give her full attention to the same event. Doing dishes takes no conscious effort, unless this is an atypical chore for you. Most of us can drive and chat with a passenger or listen to the news and tidy up.

Although autopilot tasks vary based on background and intention, activities that may fall into this category include:

- Listening to music
- Filing papers
- Basic food preparation
- Simple repair or craftwork

Thank You For Reading

Did you like this excerpt? Tell us your thoughts:  
**[bkcommunity@bkpub.com](mailto:bkcommunity@bkpub.com)**

**Berrett-Koehler Publishers**

Copyright © 2014, All Rights Reserved.