



**THE NEW YORK ENTERPRISE
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The Myth of Multi-tasking

Picture your standard morning at the office: you're checking a complicated formula in a spreadsheet. Ring! You turn away from the spreadsheet and take the phone call. When the call is over, you go back to the spreadsheet. Ding! MS Outlook just alerted you to a new email. You toggle over to your email, read it, and dash off a short response. Knock! Your partner ducks in for a quick question. You feel in control. You're multi-tasking, efficiently getting so much work done in so little time.

You're also wrong. Multi-tasking doesn't work.

As a knowledge worker, you simply cannot deploy all your mental acuity and creativity if you can't focus on the task at hand. All the interruptions of modern office life – email, Blackberries, pagers, voice mail, good old-fashioned knocks on the office door – destroy your ability to concentrate and focus.

Today's knowledge workers are interrupted on average every 11 minutes, and it takes them about 25 minutes to return to that task – if they return to it at all. And of course, even when they return to that task, it takes them a few minutes to get back into what they were doing. Add that up, and you've got a colossal waste of time. A recent study by Basex revealed that 55% of workers surveyed said they open e-mail immediately or shortly after it arrives, no matter how busy they are. Similarly, the White Collar Productivity Index by IBT-USA, a corporate efficiency training company, showed that workers lose 4.5 hours per week to interruptions.

So what can you do? The answer is simple: batching.

Batching your work means doing similar tasks at one time. For example, rather than reading each email as it comes in, schedule specific time during your day to check and answer emails. Do the same with your voice mail and your outgoing phone calls. You should also batch your interactions with people. Don't interrupt coworkers whenever you get an idea, but instead meet at regularly scheduled times. Keep a folder for each key coworker where you can drop notes and reminders for your next meeting. By respecting others' time and being mindful of their need to concentrate, they become more respectful of your time -- a virtuous circle that leads to improved efficiency.

By batching your work and reducing interruptions, you can more easily maintain your

focus on the tasks that need your attention. You'll not only do your work better, you'll do it faster as well.

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