

Multitasking: is it all it's cracked up to be or could I be doing something else?



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January 2009*

I'm answering calls whilst filling the dishwasher. I'm returning emails whilst waiting for an appointment. I'm filling in spreadsheets whilst the photocopier prints off 300 copies for the next training day and making side notes of jobs to do tomorrow. Does this sound familiar? And yet on the other hand 'not enough time', seems to be my mantra these days. Not enough time to tend to the garden, to read the books I've set aside, to finish that boring paperwork or to make those calls to friends or family members on the to do list! Days turn into weeks, weeks into months - you get the picture. Or maybe you don't. How about eating your lunch at your desk whilst surfing the net? At the end of your sandwich, can you remember what it tasted like? Leaving aside the consequences to your digestive system and the germs on your keyboard!

What about listening to your music in the car and missing the emergency lights driving up behind you?

Shopping and talking to your husband, wife, mother, daughter, friend on the phone and missing the smile from the sales assistant who has just scanned your entire trolley load with sad, lonely eyes?

Have you ever left the bath running to put the washing away and come back and found too much cold water in it?

Reading your report whilst your little boy plays at your feet and not noticing what he has just done...what has he done??

Eating out at the restaurant and getting distracted by News 24 running on the TV in the corner and not noticing that your partner is really worried, and because you don't ever do any jobs together like wash-up, you are not likely to talk to each other again until that next phone call in the supermarket, which will in fact be an exchange of information: I am in xxx, where are you? What do you want for dinner? Who's around at the weekend, blah blah...

But, have you ever noticed that when you go somewhere new for the weekend or on a longer holiday, that the pace there seems much slower? Have you ever wondered why that might seem so? I wonder if it is actually because you are taking and using the time to look and it is your pace that is the slower element. So you can absorb more of the environment, experience and have an increased awareness because you are actually looking, stopping, breathing it in. Of course you might be on a Greek island, somewhere with a small population and nothing much really happening, or in a log cabin, holed up in the snow and the pace slows, you breathe deeply, feel OK and, and maybe even start to relax (roaring



children, family, friends permitting?) Lovely, compared to the rush of the other scenarios.

Now, hey, I'm not saying that some of our wonderful tools (mobile phones, headsets, earpieces, mp3 players, dishwashers, washing machines, computers etc. etc.) aren't fabulous in their way. I have a thing for spreadsheets, but actually when I take the ability to do more than one thing, two things, three, four or more things at a time, as a life style change, I run the risk of losing sight of 'life'. Then I have let those labour saving tools (and a racing society) convince me that I must use my new spare time productively, and in turn dictate who I am, how I am and how accessible I am to those others living around me! I then miss some opportunities to make connections with, or experience, whoever or whatever may be around me.

It seems to me that we have shot ourselves in the foot somehow. We have devised so many tools that can do a job automatically that it has come with the assumption that we must be doing something else at the same time. And of course that may be true sometimes, but not necessarily always.

And in emotional terms, why do we think that we can work efficiently whilst grieving a loss? Why do we go to the meeting when we've just had some fantastic news, and feel the celebration deflate through the day? Why do we think we should pay less attention to the person on the phone, sitting next to us, who just walked past right now, because we have another job to do - why do we cram so much into a moment of time? Or are we just making different choices? Where has this hurry actually got us?

So I wonder, the next time you take a call sitting in front of your computer, turn the screen off and pay attention to the caller – see if anything is different. If you can do two things at once consider your choices; for instance, the next time you are about to load the dishwasher, maybe risk inviting someone else in the house to wash-up with you while talking about your day. The next time you are tempted to make a call whilst you are shopping, walking to the bus stop, the car, postpone the call and actually take a good look around you, notice what you might hear, smell, even feel inside of yourself and maybe just give yourself a chance to claw back a few moments of experiencing your aliveness?

Enjoy the dashing around as much as you like but maybe just add a splash of stop for the hell of it. What have you got to lose? And if your head is telling you that you can't waste the time, maybe just ask yourself what living is actually about?

