

2020 vision: Make your productivity soar

Many workplaces have evolved into cultures that not only encourage multitasking, but demand it based on the workload, resources and time-sensitive demands.

Whether you pride yourself on your multitasking abilities or feel like you're always operating at a pace that requires your head to be in multiple places at once, numerous studies suggest that days filled with distraction tend to make you less productive and less fulfilled by the work you do. Worst still, it can lead to burnout.

Control what you can

In one study on workplace distraction, workers changed tasks every three minutes and 45 seconds on average—and half of those distractions were self-imposed. When task-switching involves two completely unrelated tasks, researchers found it can take a person as long as 23 minutes to regain the lost focus.

There will always be the occasional phone call you must take or meeting you must rush off to, but there are plenty of interruptions you can eliminate by simply removing them from your workday. If you keep your personal phone near your computer as a matter of habit, put it in your desk drawer or turn it off completely.

Check it only during predetermined time blocks. If you're constantly getting "pinged" by peers and those you manage via your company's instant message app, close the chat window completely when you don't want to be interrupted. If the issue is truly urgent, people will find a way to reach you!

Schedule your work based on your attention cycles

If you know your focus is at a peak in the morning, schedule tasks that require your full attention during that time and remove all distractions.

Save those tasks that require less brain power—like update calls with working groups—for other parts of the day. Spend a week observing your own behavior to see what types of distractions are most problematic for you and note when they happen most.

If you notice that you tend to check email every few minutes while creating those weekly decks you present to leadership, start by simply removing the stimuli.

No improvement? Start playing with other variables—like when you sit down to the work, what happened before you sat down to begin it, and where you were.

Be willing to make adjustments to your day based on your findings, in the name of being a more productive and satisfied manager.

If it's easier to complete your deck at home instead of the office, plan a day where you'll leave the office early and do the work at home. In all likelihood, you'll produce better work in a shorter amount of time—and you'll be happier doing it!

Notice where your habitual distractions are a reward

Distractions you repeatedly create again and again usually have some kind of emotional pay off.

In turn, they become habits—whether you realize it or not. If you're in the habit of glancing at every text you receive while you're supposed to be working on that big report, there's a reason: It feels rewarding to you in some way.

Judson Brewer, author of *The Craving Mind*, explains that when you spend time digging into how your habitual and repeated distractions actually make you feel, you're aware and empowered to break the connection. Get honest about what the behavior really feels like.

Does texting relieve your stress and help you move further ahead in your work—or does it really make you more anxious when you leave the office knowing you're not anywhere near finishing the report? Write your answers down and be as specific possible. Hang your responses on your computer or a wall near it so you remember what actually happens when you fall into the rewarding distraction trap.

Over time you can start consciously breaking these habits and be more productive—without working any harder.