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In computer science, an interruption is a signal to a computing device that halts the execution of a program in progress so that some other action can proceed. In electrical engineering, an interruption comes in the form of a circuit that conveys a signal that stops the execution of a running program.



In everyday life, an interruption is a break in the action and is derived from the Latin words *inter*, which is to go between, and *ruptus*, which is to break off. Hence, an interruption can be described as something that comes between entities and separates them, such as you and the task you're attempting to complete! Curiously, *ruptus* is related to the word *rupture*, which in biology is defined as a *tearing apart of tissue*; in politics, a *breach of the peace*; or in everyday affairs, a *state of being broken apart*.

Interruptions Impede Productivity

For accounting professionals seeking to be highly productive, interruptions represent a "breaking apart" of their ability to stay focused and strive for completion of the task at hand. In many work environments today – the traditional office as well as in mobile settings – each of is prone to too many interruptions to even approach our potential level of productivity. Why? We're subjected to more potential interruptions than any previous workforce since *Homo erectus* emerged from caves.

Unprecedented challenges call for unprecedented solutions. It's not enough to turn your cell phone ringer or vibrator off. It's insufficient to believe that merely closing your office door will safeguard you from intruders. It's folly to believe that tomorrow is somehow going to be better than today if we don't take a certain number of measures that guarantee we can work for thirty, sixty, or ninety minutes undisturbed when we need to.

Many years ago I met with the CEO of the Planning Research Corporation (PRC) in his office on the top floor of a building on K Street in Washington, DC. From this vantage point, he was able to look out of large picture windows in three directions, including dozens of miles into Virginia. His office, the foyer leading into it, the receptionist's area prior to that, the hallway leading to that, and the entire floor, were much quieter than any other floor. Like so many other top executives, he knew the importance of being able to marinate in his own thoughts.

The Quiet to Reflect

Those reaching the top rungs of organizations and aspire to high achievement instinctively understand the importance of safeguarding their environment. They understand the value of being able to reflect on the challenges before them, to utilize the full measure of their cerebral capabilities, and craft a plan or devise a solution to do so.

In our own lives and careers, sometimes we don't have the choice of working on a quiet floor with barriers surrounding our work space that ensure the quiet we need to concentrate on the challenges before us. We do, however, have options regardless of our working environment that can increase the probability we'll have vital stretches throughout the day and the week, where we're free of disturbances and can safely predict that interruptions won't take us off course.

Sometime during the week, most career professionals have the opportunity to take command of their immediate environment through a variety of well-known procedures, but unfortunately, not as often as they might like.

Interruption-Proof Your Environment

In my book *Breathing Space*, originally published by MasterMedia in 1990 and revised several times since, I offer suggestions for safeguarding your working environment and minimizing interruptions:

- Surround yourself with everything you need to fully engage in the change process, which might involve assembling resources, people, and space as well as ensuring that you have a quiet environment free of distractions.
- Give yourself the hours or days you need to read, study, and absorb what's occurring, and to make decisions about how you'll apply new ways of doing things and new technology to your career, business, or organization.
- Go "cold turkey," which is not recommended for most people! Suspend whatever else you're doing and engage in whatever it takes to incorporate a new way of doing things. This is enhanced by ensuring that you'll have no disturbances, bringing in outside experts, and assembling any other resources you need to succeed.

As the Allstate commercial says, "Life comes at you fast." In the future, today will seem like an era of peace and tranquility. Life will come at us ever faster as our technology and mobile devices connect us with more and more people and information sources around the world. We have to establish effective habits and procedures to help buttress ourselves against what we know is coming: more information, more communication, more to sift through, more to learn, and more to respond to.

Our workweek and our lives are finite. We can only cram in so much information within a given period of time. The ability to

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understand and absorb what we need to and keep at bay all the extraneous information that competes for our attention, are skills that must be developed, honed, and refined now. It won't be any easier later.

The sooner we recognize that our interruption-based society is here to stay (at least for a while), the sooner we can embrace and securely put into place those measures that will ensure that we can be at our best for today and for the long run.

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About the author:

Jeff Davidson, The Work-Life Balance Expert® and a preeminent time-management authority, has written fifty-nine mainstream books. He is an electrifying professional speaker, making 806 presentations since 1985 to such clients as Kaiser Permanente, IBM, American Express, Lufthansa, Swissotel, America Online, RE/MAX, Worthington Steel, and the World Bank. Jeff is executive director of the Breathing Space Institute. Learn more about achieving work-life balance on his websites, www.BreathingSpace.com and www.Work-LifeBalance.net, and through his twenty-four iPhone apps available at www.itunes.com/apps/BreathingSpaceInstitute.