

Master Interruptions or They Will Master You

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Over the last ten years, increasingly you have found yourself being interrupted in the course of a work day with greater frequency. How do I know this to be true? We've all experienced it. Interruptions are now the chief impediment for HR professionals when it comes to getting things done. Worse still, interruptions are on the rise!

A survey by Basex, a U.S. technology research firm, reveals that interruptions account for 28 percent of the typical career professional's workday. On average, employees typically get only 11 minutes to focus on any task before they encounter another interruption! Then, *another* 25 minutes on average are consumed before returning to the original task or project, *if it happens at all on that day*.

While some people are specifically hired to be interrupted – receptionists come to mind – most career professionals, most of the time, have more leeway over their schedules, when they ought to be available, and when they prefer not to be.

Fear Strikes Out

Why do so many people allow themselves to be bombarded by interruptions around the clock? In a single word: fear. They fear that if they are not readily available, opportunities will pass them by. They fear that if they are not instantly responsive, they will be regarded as less competent. They fear that if they are not "Johnny-on-the-spot," they will be regarded as shirking their responsibilities.

These erroneous notions strike deep into the mind and emotions of many people in today's labor force. Yet, to do your best work often requires being able to give your complete and undivided attention to the task at hand, not only being free of interruptions, but knowing in advance *that you will not be interrupted*. The notion that you might be interrupted during a given task might not only impede your productivity, but inhibit you from beginning in the first place!

The most productive members of society, in one way or another, gravitate to the idea that they must safeguard their work environment and determine in advance how and when they can be reached. These highly productive individuals recognize that working in the face of constant interruptions takes a toll. The loss of focus and concentration as well as overall productivity is simply not worth it.

What do the highly productive among us do to stay productive, keep interruptions at bay, and still remain in the communications loop? They keep their communication technology at hand and periodically check to see who has left a message, and then immediately turn back to the task at hand. By briefly monitoring the calls and text messages that come in, but not responding to them, they are able to quickly turn back to their work and make good progress.

Apply Your Own Measures

You may have already gravitated towards this procedure, but now let's up the ante. If you monitor your messages every five or 10 minutes, increase the interval to 15 or 20. In the grand scope of things that's not a big deal in terms of staying informed, while at the same time affording you the ability to stay focused and accomplish great things. In time, increase the interval to 25-30 minutes. You'll accomplish even more.

On those rare occasions where you monitor your messages and something requires your immediate response, by all means, get in touch with that party. To not do so would create more anxiety than you need to endure.