



Being Constantly Interrupted: Who Needs It?

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This is not news to you: we live in an interruption-oriented society. The ability to sneak off, to find quiet, or to rest is challenging in the age of mobile devices. What's more, the noise level of society in general has been increasing steadily for decades.

Try to read a magazine on your front porch in the late autumn, and invariably one or more of your neighbors will be toting an ear shattering leaf blower, rounding up every leaf in sight. At work, our bosses, peers, and associates have no qualms about dropping by, calling, paging, emailing, text messaging, or instant messaging *all day long*.

While each of us craves the ability to work uninterrupted on occasion, especially on highly critical, challenging, or first-time types of tasks, we forget, that we interrupt others with the same abandon that they interrupt us. Worse, even when we have the ability to control our exposure to the next voicemail, email, or text message,

craving to know who has gotten in touch with us lately, we succumb, and click and tap away to see who our latest correspondent may be.

The Rising Tide

The research regarding interruptions in the workplace today paints a grim picture. Unmistakably, interruptions are on the rise. Basex, a U.S. technology research firm, completed a survey that reveals with which interruptions account for 28% of the typical career professionals' workday.

Worse, on average, employees typically get only 11 minutes to focus on any task before encountering another interruption. Thereafter, another 25 minutes on average are consumed before returning to the original task or project, *if it happens at all on that day* . Other studies show that interruptions typically occur between every three and eight minutes and, that once a worker is interrupted, there is an almost 25 percent chance that resuming on the original task won't occur until the following day.

It's time to declare your independence. No one controls your schedule exactly like you do, not even an authoritarian boss. Most of the interruptions that plague you in the course of a day are in part, your own doing.

Allow or Do Not Allow

At some level, you allow most interruptions to happen – either because you think you have to be available 24/7, or you fear missing the one phone call, or one email message that will make or break your quarter, or for that matter your career. You fall into the trap of being too available, of checking messages too frequently, and of not relying on your natural ability to accomplish great things when you're able to focus intently on the task at hand.

Here then are some suggestions for taking charge of your personal environment, so that you can be your most productive self in those situations where concentration, intensity, and focus are essential:

- Surround yourself with everything you need to fully engage in the process, which also 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.