Multitasking: More Harm than Good in Medical Practices

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I belong to a local health club, and while I was there one day, I saw a woman get on the stairmaster. I watched as she whipped out an MP3 player and started listening to music. Then, to my surprise, she reached into her gym bag, pulled out a book, and placed it on the ledge to read. I almost asked her if she would like a piece of gum!

More often than we care to acknowledge, in the office and at home, we invite more than we can handle. As individuals, throughout society, we are trained to believe that the ability to multitask is a great attribute. Unfortunately, that's a big mistake. Here's why, and how to avoid multitasking in the future.

First things first
We are trained to believe that tackling multiple items at once is efficient and productive. But the fastest and easiest way to handle multiple tasks is actually to identify the most important task, second most important, third most important, and so on. Then tackle the first and finish it all the way, move on to the second and complete it, then move all the way down the list.

Ignore the temptation to multitask. It's almost as if juggling projects, switching gears unnecessarily or abruptly, or leaving a job unfinished to start a new project gives you the opportunity to say to other people, "Hey, look at me! Look how involved I am! Look at how busy I am! I'm great at multitasking." A multitasker, however, can't compete with others who tackle their to-do list one item at a time.

When you are working on a new task, brainstorming, engaging in first-time thinking, or doing creative work, it's important to focus your complete and undivided attention to that one task. To dissipate your attention, in that case, means you are not going to do the best job.

Here are a few tips to reduce the temptation to multitask:
• Give yourself five to ten minute stretches to focus on the task at hand
• Safeguard your immediate environment to avoid interruptions (for more tips on how to reduce distractions, click here).
• Acknowledge yourself whenever you stick to one task and finish it
• Repeat all the above at least once a day, knowing that the more you can do these activities the better!