

Extricate yourself from the multitasking mess

There's no shame in 'uni-tasking'. In fact, it may be better for you.

09:41 AM CST on Monday, February 20, 2006

By Libby Gill

When did we all decide that multitasking was supposed to be a full-time way of life? That we were slackers if we weren't negotiating a deal, checking our e-mail and whipping up a batch of cupcakes all at the same time? Here's a radical thought: Why don't we all just relax and indulge in the luxury of some single-minded focus for a change?

As a personal coach and lecturer – and a recovering workaholic – I meet a lot of people suffering from multitasking meltdown. Like Susan (not her real name), an attorney and mother of two, who thought the perfect balance between work and family commitments was to start her day driving her daughter's carpool while making cellphone calls and checking her BlackBerry at red lights.

No wonder that, in a rare moment, when she actually had time to converse with the gang of pre-adolescent girls in the back of the SUV, she was shocked to discover most of them planned to shun the juggling act to become stay-at-home moms.

DallasNews.com/extra

[I wanted to choose numbness'](#)

[Libby Gill: Take the family baggage questionnaire](#)

When I work with people who share Susan's obsession, I have them do a simple self-assessment to look at patterns of behavior that emerge when the multitasking monster rears its ugly head.

Next, we challenge their convictions that they're unproductive or downright lazy if they're not accomplishing more than one thing at a time. I'm not talking about folding the laundry while you watch *Sex and the City* reruns or listening to NPR while you're driving to work. That's not multitasking; that's just a good use of time.

I'm talking about having dinner with your family while you're secretly obsessing about sales quotas or taking a client's call while you're in the bathtub. Not only are you getting less pleasure from the nonwork tasks, you're performing the work tasks with less proficiency.

Starting today, here's what I want you to do. Find an activity, just one, to which you can commit your full attention, if only for a few minutes a day. Turn off the cellphone, put down the laundry basket, banish the BlackBerry and discover why "uni-tasking" trumps multitasking every time. Pick something you love but can't seem to find enough time for, or something you'd rather avoid but know is in your best interest.

Whether your activity is picking flowers, practicing yoga or writing a business proposal, focus fully on the task. You'll notice how surrendering to a task, even a mundane one, can provide an almost luxurious feeling of pleasure and, often, a profound sense of competence.

So choose your activity and remember these three things:

1. Shut out external distractions.
2. Focus fully on your task for at least five minutes.
3. Repeat this process for a week with the task of your choice.

As I look up from my desk where I've been blissfully lost to my work for the past few hours, I see the late afternoon light washing the room in a warm glow. If I mindfully move on to my next task, I'll be able to bask in the last bit of sunset through the kitchen window as I luxuriate in peeling potatoes for my family's dinner.

Libby Gill is a personal coach, lecturer and author of [Traveling Hopefully](#). E-mail questions to AskLibby@LibbyGill.com and tell her whether she may use your question and name in a future column.

Online at: http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/fea/columnists/lgill/stories/DN-NSO_libbygill_0220liv.ART.State.Edition1.913d9e3.html