

## On Multitasking

Ken Smith

kgsmith@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

Multitasking and being scattered are a fact of life for most of contemporary humanity. The clever invent new distractions constantly. The clamor only increases and shows no signs of decreasing. Honing the ability to focus on one thing at a time in this distracting world will be more and more difficult and just as useful.

### the causes

Life asks a lot of the modern human. At our jobs, we are often required to juggle multiple activities simultaneously. Even when we aren't required to, we voluntarily answer emails while on a conference call or plan a meeting while listening to music, for example. We're used to multitasking. It gives us comfort to let the mind have all the stimulus it can handle. But notice, when you're doing more than one thing at a time, how effective you are at each task. How much do you accomplish after an hour of multitasking? What if you focused all your attention on one task for some time, then another for the rest?

### the symptoms

When we multitask, we are spreading our energy out over a wider area than when we singletask. The seductive illusion is that we can achieve greater efficiency and greater productivity when we allow multiple activities to share our minds. It's harder to multitask than to singletask so it feels like we are accomplishing more. Working harder feels better than working less hard for the industrious. Conversely, singletasking is comparatively easier and therefore feels like we are wasting time.

**a claim**

Despite the impression we get that we are being more productive when we multitask, singletasking is more efficient. Singletasking is more productive and leaves the mind less tired for a given amount of work.

**an exercise**

There may be studies on this with data to support these claims but I'm not interested in the data at this point in our conversation. Hold these ideas in your heart and notice for yourself what they mean and whether they're true. Try doing familiar tasks that you're used to doing in parallel and serialize them. Don't do them all at once. Focus your entire energy toward a single task, finish it, then move on to the next. Devote yourself fully to your continuously evolving moment.

Notice how you feel and how much you accomplish when you try this. What is different about the experience? What is the same? Do you feel like you worked as hard or did you work harder? Was the quality of your effort different? Did you see things differently and perform each task a little better or a little worse?

**conclusion**

You're busy so I'll leave you with the suggestion to try that experiment in various places in your life. I believe you will discover for yourself that singletasking is more efficient, produces better results, and leaves you feeling less taxed than multitasking. You'll make fewer mistakes in emails to your clients and get consistently better scores in Angry Birds.