

INTRODUCTION



MYTH
Multitasking leads to success.

REALITY
Multitasking leads to mistakes.

You would not believe how difficult it is to be simple and clear. People are afraid that they may be seen as a simpleton. In reality, just the opposite is true.

JACK WELCH

Evelyn was excited about an essay she had written for a class she was taking. She asked if she could read it to me.

“Sure! I’d love to hear it!” Then I glanced down at my iPhone. Big mistake.

I assumed she’d need a moment to retrieve her essay, and I had been waiting all day to hear the results of a recently submitted project proposal. There was an email from the prospect.

Evelyn began to read, but by now I was far away.

“Wait!” I said. Evelyn stopped.

My glance at the email had revealed that my company’s proposal was not selected for the contract on which I had spent the better part of a week. “Oh no!” I wailed. “That is ridiculous! They totally blew it!”

By now Evelyn couldn’t hide her annoyance. “Never mind.”

I begged forgiveness, tossed my iPhone facedown on the table, and convinced her to start reading her essay to me all over again.

From this, I realized two basic facts:

1. I couldn’t be a truly present listener with my attention split between Evelyn’s essay and the disappointing news I had to share tomorrow with my colleagues.
2. When visiting with a friend in the evening, it is absolutely unnecessary to check on the results of a work proposal.

Let's Get It Started

Do you ever look at the clock upon the day's end and wonder where the time went? Are you nonstop busy yet lack a sense of accomplishment? Does your to-do list grow rather than shrink, despite your best efforts?

Please say it's not just me.

In my research for a book about singletasking, I spoke with hundreds of people. The majority reacted along the lines of "I need that!" Or alternatively, "My coworker/spouse/friend/boss/employee needs that!" Yet the idea of relinquishing multitasking turns out to be surprisingly controversial. The intensity of responses reminded me of how certain folks get revved up over politics or religion. Some people were incensed, refusing to accept that singletasking is remotely plausible. Multitasking is an ingrained cultural expectation, woven into the fabric of our times.

Consider the following response to my suggestion that a credible and superior alternative to multitasking exists: "I like the idea of singletasking but I'm afraid it's not for me. Frankly, singletasking sounds like a luxury, and not one that people in business can generally afford. Does it sound nice to focus on one thing at a time? Sure! Would I have time to sleep? I'm doubtful. Please prove me wrong!"

Got it. I will. I like a challenge.

Singletasking is not a luxury; it is a necessity. You can accomplish far more doing one thing at a time, plus enjoy sleep. In fact, increased restorative time is both an outcome of—and a contributor to—a singletasked life.

My work is further fueled by comments such as, “I multi-task all the time. I have to. I wouldn’t be able to get anything done otherwise. It is impossible to function without it.”

Offering an alternative to the societal norm has never been easy. Galileo lived in an era when the Earth was widely considered to be the center of the universe. He challenged this belief, boldly attesting that the planets—Earth included—rotate around the sun. He was consequently investigated by the Roman Inquisition, found guilty of heresy, and placed under house arrest. Yikes.

That multitasking has a real following is quite the understatement. When I say it is an illusion—well, let’s face it, that’s consultant heresy. I’ll never work in this town again!

When mavericks go against the grain, two components have to be in place. First, we have to really, really believe in what we espouse. Second, we cannot stop ourselves from sharing what we know to be true.

And so, my friends, I present to you the Singletasking Principle:

► **Get more done, one thing at a time.**

Recall a time you were counting something—money, items, your pulse, or accolades—lost your train of thought, and had to start again. There are two likely reasons you lost count. One is internal: your mind wandered. The second is that an external stimulus distracted you.

The former demonstrates how an unruly mind can derail even a simple task. The latter shows how succumbing to external distractions wastes, rather than saves, time. Either way, an interruption scrambled your focus, decreasing your productivity. You'll now need to start all over on your singularly important job of counting.

This book provides a system with versatile tools to help you restore your attention to what matters most. You will learn how to manage your mind, your environment, and all those pesky people who come between you and your potential. You will gain insights that enable you to consistently finish what you begin. By immersing yourself in one task at a time, one moment at a time, you'll accomplish more while enjoying deeper, stronger relationships.

What about distractions? You'll learn how to mitigate disruptions originating in your mind as well as those meandering around your workplace.

Go ahead; let free a sigh of relief.

Welcome to Singletasking

The themes of this book are presented in three primary sections:

Part 1: Reclaim Your Life

Part 2: Regain Control

Part 3: Recall What Matters

Part 1 provides the groundwork. This section debunks multitasking as a viable solution to a hectic life, introduces