**Stop Multitasking Your Way Through Life!**

**(You’re Missing All the Good Stuff.)**

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*Multitasking* … It’s a buzz word we hear all the time in the working world, and now it seems to have spilled over into our personal lives. Societal values make us believe that we have to juggle dozens of tasks at once in order to be productive, and technology deludes us into thinking that we’re actually affective doing so. So, we go about our day, driving to work while drinking our coffee and talking on the phone. We gather around the dinner table at night with our laptop in front of us, checking email while attempting to eat and spend quality time with our spouse. We run on the treadmill at the gym while phoning an aging parent to make sure they’ve remembered to take their medication, with one eye on the clock so we’re not late in picking up our grandkids for the weekend.

This fast-paced lifestyle amounts to what has become a plague of modern society – a chattering mind and an uneasy state of being. We’ve become so accustomed to it, that a 2014 study from the University of Virginia found that most people would rather experience mild electric shock than to be asked to sit quietly with their thoughts, doing nothing for fifteen minutes.

**The Dangers of Multitasking**

Time had little meaning to our ancestors aside from sunrises, sunsets and the seasons. Our DNA is still that of these ancestors, and trying to adapt to our new, hyperactive world leads to anxiety and stress. This pervasive and toxic chronic stress raises our risk of heart disease, dementia, depression and cancer, among other things. And, to what end?

Research has consistently demonstrated that multitasking blunts productivity instead of helping it, and it stifles our creativity. When we multitask, our brains our not actually processing several activities at once, but instead jumping from one topic to the next, resulting in up to 40% more mistakes than if were were to tackle one task at a time.

More important, our relationships suffer from perpetual distractions and our need to continually do more. All of this diminishes our sense of accomplishment and overall wellbeing, and causes us to miss out on truly experiencing the lives that we’re supposed to be living.

**Slow Down to Be More Productive**

Einstein would go for long walks, allowing his mind to be still, and it was in those moments that great breakthroughs emerged.

When you find yourself becoming overwhelmed with career, family and social obligations, concerns over health and relationships, and what you fear missing out on if you don’t move fast enough, try this …

1. **Prioritize.** Create a to-do list for the week, and as you write those things on your calendar, ask yourself, “Is this a priority?” Or, “Do I really need to be doing this *right now*?” It may be that it’s something you can delegate to someone else or take off your plate until you have more time to devote to it. If you soon find that your calendar is jam-packed, start cutting things out. In fact, can you cut that list by half?
2. **Ask for Help.** Our ancestors had the support of their tribe. However, as a culture, we tend to isolate ourselves from one another. This is a good opportunity to reconnect with your friends and loved ones and tag-team your efforts. For example, maybe a neighbor has kids of about the same age. Can one of you take on caretaking responsibilities for designated days of the week while the other is finishing up a deadline-driven project at work? If you are in a household where you are caring for an aging parent while also raising young children, can you encourage them to spend time together?
3. **Tackle One Task at a Time.**  Dr. Sandi Chapman, the Founder and Chief Director of the Center for Brain Health at the University of Texas at Dallas discusses in her book, *Make Your Brain Smarter,* the “power of one.” Our brains are not wired to do two things at once. Instead of multitasking, she recommends we sequential task, focusing on one thing at a time. Close out your email or mute your phone, if you need to, in order to focus on the task at hand.
4. **Unplug Regularly** – Schedule several blocks of time where you can be technologically “unplugged” for at least an hour (sleeping doesn’t count). During that time, refrain from checking your cell phone for calls, emails, or texts or logging on to your computer to surf the net. Devote this time to read, participate in a hobby or meet a friend for lunch.
5. **Be Mindful Throughout Your Day** – Take control of your chattering mind. As thoughts or worries come up that cause you to think about anything other than what you are doing at a given moment, guide yourself back to the present. For example, the moment you find yourself having a stressful thought, stop and notice your breath. Take at least 30 seconds to slowly breath in … pause … and then exhale out. Feel the experience of your ribcage expanding and contracting as you breathe, and if you find your mind wandering, guide it back to your breath. Thirty seconds is a small investment in your wellbeing.

***Live Long. Live well!***