



Attention Divided: Avoid Multi-Tasking

My name is Beverly and I'm a recovering multi-tasker. Like others of my ilk, I used to take pride in my juggling skills. I believed that tackling two or three tasks simultaneously was a sign of efficiency. Boy, was I wrong!

The truth is we just aren't wired for multi-tasking. Research shows that when we attempt to switch our attention back and forth we take [50% longer to finish a task and make up to 50% more errors](#). In the worst case scenario, [multi-tasking can literally cost us our lives](#) or at a minimum, [our dignity](#).

So make a pledge here and now to stop the insanity:

The human brain, with its hundred billion neurons and hundreds of trillions of synaptic connections, is a cognitive powerhouse in many ways. **"But a core limitation is an inability to concentrate on two things at once,"** said René Marois, a neuroscientist and director of the Human Information Processing Laboratory at [Vanderbilt University](#). Source: [The New York Times](#)

- Control distractions – like the annoying pop-up: "You've Got Mail!" or push notifications on your smartphone or mobile device. In fact, turn your smartphone OFF occasionally.
- [Give yourself a break from social media and the Internet](#).
- Set boundaries for reading and responding to e-mail and texts.
- Schedule a specific time each day to make and return phone calls.
- Advise clients of your business practices – office hours, availability by phone, ability to accommodate unscheduled appointments.
- Embrace "[single tasking](#)."
- Ditch the guilt. Much of the reason we feel compelled to multi-task is because we believe it is expected of us.
- Respect each other's time whenever possible. "Do You Have a Minute?" almost always translates into a much longer interruption.

The [Professional Liability Fund](#) offers resources that can help, including guides on how to eliminate phone interruptions and establish call-back policies as well as sample client brochures explaining office and billing practices. From the [PLF home page](#), select Practice Aids and Forms, then Client Relations.

For another perspective, read this [post about concentration from Scott Scheper](#) – a compelling and creative take on how to get focused, use "chunking" to get things done, and beat down procrastination.

Copyright 2011 Beverly Michaelis

My sincere thanks to [Michelle Mangen](#) for inspiring this blog post.

Originally posted February 14, 2011 at

<http://oregonlawpracticemanagement.wordpress.com/2011/02/14/attention-divided/>