

Stop Shifting Gears and Stay Focused

Research shows that a three second distraction doubles errors and a four-and-a-half second interruption triples errors. Are numerous daily distractions wreaking havoc on your productivity and efficiency?

When was the last time you placed a “do not disturb” sign on your door? If the answer is never, today is a good day to start. Research by both Michigan State University and the Navy has determined that errors are made immediately after interruptions even if the interruption lasts only a few seconds.

Whether you are working on a massive long-term project or a brief e-mail to an associate, distractions cause a loss in focus that can be both costly and time-consuming. Focus is the single most important tool in your arsenal for being efficient, effective and productive. A great vision without focus can never be achieved. A great team that is not focused cannot achieve the vision. And a great idea when not focused upon will become irrelevant, stagnant and have little or no value.

Walt Disney dreamed about creating the greatest magical destinations in the world and succeeded due to his devotion to vision, determination and focus. Steve Jobs created electronic tools that consumers never dreamed of because of his vision and intense focus. Both of these innovators were successful because of their ability to focus on their unique visions.

A Focus Plan that Improves Performance

Distractions, interruptions and multi-tasking are often forced activities in a busy work schedule. It is important to first recognize that such interruptions can dramatically lesson your productivity and impair efficiency. Once you realize how much damage they do, it is time to create a plan to remove the distractions and maintain your focus.

Schedule interruption time. First, post a “do not disturb” sign on your door to warn peers and associates that you are focused on a specific project or issue. Then, set aside time for multi-tasking and interruptions. Depending upon your circumstances it can be the last 10 minutes of each hour. Or you can schedule half hour time segments twice in the morning and twice in the afternoon to deal with necessary but non-urgent issues. The only time you should be interrupted as needed is for an urgent matter. By actually scheduling such time, colleagues will be less likely to interrupt you and you will be more productive – and so will they.

Turn off all electronic equipment. This list includes your cell phone, the e-mail received sound on your computer announcing that you have mail, all social media and any other devices that may interrupt you. There are untold hours of

productivity lost and errors made due the interruptions of electronic equipment and social media. Personal tweets, Facebook time and connecting with family members are the greatest distractors of all. Social media should be relegated to off hours and family interruptions, unless an emergency, should be limited.

Shut the door. Improving your performance comes through focus. And focus comes from a quiet space where concentration can be maximized. The only way to achieve quiet space is to shut the door and keep out the interruptions and distractions. Every time you are interrupted you have to shift gears mentally, causing a major break in your focus. When you maintain your focus, you improve your performance while increasing your efficiency and productivity.

Focus was one of the keys to the enormous success of Walt Disney and Steve Jobs. Finding a way to stay focused and stop shifting gears is critical to your success and the success of your company. Develop your own strategy from the tools above and begin today.

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