

I'm terrible at multitasking and I'm proud of it. My kind used to be derided as hopelessly unhip in our age of camera/music/phone/web/calendar/calculator/walkie-talkie.

Now we're celebrated as Zen geniuses of modern mindfulness.

Studies show technology increasingly tempts us to do more than one thing (and, increasingly, more than one complicated thing) at a time, whether it's checking email while talking on the phone, eating while driving, or even checking email, eating, talking on the phone, and driving.

Well, apparently, the joke's on us, because it turns out the brain isn't a superhuman version of a Google algorithm.

Researchers have found that repeatedly switching from one task to another causes us to take significantly longer to accomplish tasks. Surprise! Multitasking actually slows us down rather than speeds us up.

Worse — multitasking causes us to make mistakes.

Much worse — multitasking eventually shuts down our brains altogether.

Picture one unlucky electrical outlet stuffed with a TV, DVD, iPod, iPhone, coffee machine, curling iron, Xbox, and PlayStation.

Now picture it blown to bits.

That's your brain on multitasking.

Somehow I think you know exactly what I'm talking about.

When we blow our real-live circuitry, however, the consequences are much greater than a mere power outage.

Picture snapping at your colleagues, screaming at your spouse, nearly striking your child, or crashing your car.

These days, experts now espouse the unthinkable — Doing One Thing At A Time — with deliberate, concentrated focus. They say this approach doesn't just decrease stress — with its accompanying cortisol payload — it increases well-being.

When we actively, intensely engage in one task, even when that task is tedious (picture

folding laundry), we go into a pseudo-trance that experts call "flow."

I'm sure you've experienced this magical rush at one time or another. It's engrossing, powerful; it feels like a high. Maybe it's the neurobiological definition of passion.

In any case, it's single-minded absorption, not multitasked distraction, that floods us with feelings of fulfillment, yes, even when it involves daily drudgery. Literally putting your mind to the accomplishment of an undertaking brings unprecedented feelings of satisfaction, serenity, and inner peace.

And studies show these feelings are what we crave most from life — more than comfort, praise, love, or *Dancing with the Stars*.

Personally, I don't need a study to tell me that this is an age-old case of quality over quantity.

We in Consumer Nation haven't learned yet that less is more; that we don't double our contentment when we double our shoes, gadgets, homes, marriages, or friends. Accumulation, ironically, isn't the answer to emptiness.

In physics, this is called the *Law of Diminishing Returns*. I like to call it the *Law of Smorgasbords*.

Those first morsels from the buffet always taste like pure gastronomical heaven, but the divinely delight doesn't last. Pretty soon, it's a Herculean chore just to finish what's on our plate; then we suffer sensations of bloating, discomfort, and guilt.

Life, too, is filled with honest limitations.

There are, sadly, goals we'll never reach, milestones we'll never achieve, and dreams we'll never fulfill, no matter how much we load onto our plates.

The real world is limited, but the inner world of our mind is limitless; vast, infinite, and the perfect place to pursue true, enduring happiness.

Instead of loading, accumulating, multitasking, stuffing that outlet with more and more objects, mindlessly, inattentively, distractedly; we need to reset our brains to mindful attentiveness — to appreciate, enjoy, and celebrate — what we *do* have, now.

Only then will we feel truly full, not starving for something that's always out of reach.



WHY I NEVER, EVER MULTITASK

The magic of mindfulness, or quality over quantity

Robin Friedman

*"The hurrieder I go,
the behinder I get."*

Amish saying