

Passion for Life Coaching

Making Deliberate Choices for a Fulfilling Life

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February is Time Management Month – And So Much More!

A friend and business associate informed me that February is National Time Management month. I had no idea! There seems to be a month for everything these days, and I am pretty sure most months are pulling double, triple, or quadruple duty on being designated as a month for something. Out of curiosity, I wondered how many observances were assigned to February. The answer – over 30! I found the familiar observance of African American History month to the health conscious American Heart month. National Pet Dental Month occurs in February, I discovered, because my dog needs her teeth cleaned and I receive 10% off the service. And, I am not kidding, February is also Return Shopping Carts to the Supermarket month and National Hot Breakfast month.

Returning to the observance of Time Management month, my point is that we have brought multitasking to a new level. Even our months multitask, trying to be special observances to several organizations and events. Pause for a moment and consider - how much do you multitask in your daily life? Being a coach does not exempt me from multitasking. In fact, I consider myself an expert multitasker. For example, when I have several deadlines approaching, I will pull out resources and materials for each of them. Then, I start working on one project, remember I need to send an e-mail, shift my attention to a new task, and then jump to making a phone call. On the surface, I appear very productive. Truthfully, I achieve little. I fool myself into believing that multitasking is productive. A term now exists to describe this state: frazzing, or the frantic multitasking with the delusion of accomplishing a lot but sacrificing the quality of the work.

Perhaps this is a familiar scenario. You arrive home from work and begin preparing dinner. While you cook, you listen to your phone messages, put in a load of laundry, check email, and start making phone calls. Getting caught up in so many tasks, you forget you are cooking until you think, "What's that smell?" You cut short your conversation with your friend to salvage dinner. After an overcooked dinner, you realize the laundry is still wet because you forgot to move it to the drier.

The January 16, 2006 issue of Time magazine summarized recent studies about multitasking and time management. Researchers have begun to explore the effects of multitasking and the devices, like laptops and Blackberrys, that were intended increase our productivity. First, researchers have identified a condition known as attention deficit trait (ADT). With ADT, we experience difficulty prioritizing the overwhelming amount of incoming messages and tasks that vie for our attention. As a result, we feel distracted, impulsive, and guilty for not being able to get things done. Interruptions constitute another challenge to accomplishing tasks. Basex, an information technology research firm, reports that interruptions, such as emails, phone calls, and coworkers, cost 2.1 hours per day. Another study showed that workers spent an average of 11 minutes on a task before they were interrupted and then took an astounding 25 minutes to return to a task, if they ever returned at all. The Basex study also revealed that 55% of workers surveyed opened emails immediately. All of the distractions and multiple tasks at work can cause added stress. Psychologists have long said a little stimulation increases productivity but an overwhelming amount decreases productivity.

So, what can you do to stop multitasking and reclaim your time and focus? Here are a few suggestions that work for me and for those I coach.

1. Prioritize tasks – Know what is most important and what absolutely needs to get finished. Complete one thing at a time. I have noticed that by doing one thing at a time, I finish that task in less time than if I am shifting between multiple tasks.
2. Return phone calls and emails at specific times – When is the last time you received a life-or-death email? Use your email's "away feature" or phone's voice message to let others know when they can expect a response.
3. Say "No" to interruptions – Enforce your limits on how others use your time. A 10-minute consultation is just that – 10 minutes. Or, if now is not a good time to talk, say so.
4. Limit your time to work on tasks – Murphy's Law: A task will fill up the time you give it. If you begin a project without a time limit, the project may consume your whole day. For example, surfing the internet for information can take hours as you get distracted by pop-ups and other information.
5. Purposefully leave your electronic devices behind – Not taking your laptop or cell phone forces you to focus on the present and be aware of what you are doing. No distractions equal increased awareness.
6. Only put materials/paperwork for one project on your desk – Keeping your space uncluttered reduces distractions and the anxiety that can arise when it appears you have "a million things to do."
7. Acknowledge your need to take a break – Establish a time you can take a break. Let coworkers know that you can chat for a few minutes at 2:30p. If you work at home, take breaks to eat lunch and read a good book. Pause for 5 minutes to stretch or take a walk.
8. Use a planner – Planners that allow you to plan each day by the hour can be most helpful. Block out time for each activity. If you are a visual person, use different colors to "code" your tasks and alert you to your time limits.
9. Add time for yourself in your schedule – Schedule time to do the things you love. Taking care of your needs makes you happier, less stressed, and allows you to stimulate your creativity.
10. Get enough sleep – Simply put, rest allows your mind and body to rejuvenate.

In honor of Time Management month, let's manage our time better by focusing our attention and doing one thing at a time. It's working for me already! Without any distractions, I have completed this newsletter in one hour. Now, I am moving on to my next project.

Suggested reading:

Take Time for Your Life – Cheryl Richardson

Time Shifting, Creating More Time to Enjoy Your Life – Stephen Rechtschaffen

CrazyBusy: Overstretched, Overbooked, and About to Snap – Strategies for Coping in a World Gone ADD – Edward Hallowell

EXCITING NEWS! My website has been updated. To learn more about coaching and who I coach, visit my website at www.passion-for-life-coaching.com.

Please forward this newsletter to others you believe would enjoy it. I welcome new subscribers! To subscribe/unsubscribe, please send an email to passionforlifecoaching@verizon.net. I also welcome feedback and ideas for future topics.

To find out more contact me at passionforlifecoaching@verizon.net or 410-757-7326 to schedule a complimentary 30-minute session. Coaching sessions are generally conducted by telephone so you do not need to reside in the same area as the coach.