



Stop Switch-tasking

Guide

Legal Ease Consulting, Inc.

The Stop Switchtasking Guide: Legal Ease Consulting

Multi-tasking costs you time, money and relationships

If you multitask, you probably think that you're being productive. But the truth is that you can't accomplish two things which require you to expend mental energy at once; you can only do one at a time. When you "multitask," in actuality you're constantly switching between one activity and another. In his book [The Myth of Multitasking](#), author Dave Crenshaw calls this "switchtasking."

Switchtasking is rapidly switching between two or more tasks, and Crenshaw's book demonstrates how switchtasking costs time and damages relationships. Think about it: have you ever walked into someone's office (or been called to their office) only to have them checking email or going through documents while they're talking to you?

How did that make you feel? Do you think that person was really listening to you? Have you ever done that to someone else?

How about checking email while you're on the phone? Were you really listening to the other caller? Did you have to return to the email after the call anyway? Have you ever been on the other end of the phone and gotten the feeling that the person on the other end wasn't listening to you? Did it prolong the conversation? Did you have to repeat yourself?

The fact is that switchtasking will always cost you time – you will always be less effective if you are “multitasking” then if you focus on one thing at a time.

There are exceptions to the “no-multitasking” rule: on occasion, you can do more than one thing at a time, but only if only one of those tasks requires mental energy. One example might be listening to music while you’re on the treadmill etc. Crenshaw calls this “background tasking.” One task is the main focus while the other occurs in the background and doesn’t require your direct attention. This works best with rote tasks.

According to a [Harvard Business Review article](#), when you switch from doing a primary task to doing something else, you increase the time it takes to finish the original task by 25 percent.

How to Stop Switchtasking

Before you decide to answer that phone or wave that associate or assistant into your office, ask, ***“What will the switching cost be of this interruption?”***

Then decide if it’s worth the cost.

If not, here are three things you can do instead:

1. Set specific times when you are available for meetings or to check in with those you supervise, or ask your supervisor for a time when you can meet so you aren't trying to catch them whenever they are in the office. These regular meetings can be quick, stand-up meetings once or twice a day, or longer weekly meetings, depending on who you're meeting with and why (Learn more about managing staff interruptions in [this video](#)).
2. Plan ahead: decide which tasks are priorities and be sure you are prepared for each task before you begin. Don't overwhelm yourself with an impossibly long to-do list. Instead, focus on the tasks that are the most important for you, your firm and your clients. Remember – some of those tasks (like marketing, or sending out your invoices) may not be billable, but that doesn't mean they're not important. (Learn more about planning [here](#) and [here](#)).
3. Work uninterrupted for a block of time on high-level priorities – during these times, don't let yourself be interrupted by drop-ins, the phone or email. If necessary, leave your office, put your phone on do not disturb, and/or tell people you are unavailable for a 60–90-minute block of time. If you're working from home, this is even more important because there are infinitely more distractions. Create a system for family members so they know when you should not be disturbed, so you can get more done and ensure that you are not violating client confidentiality. (Learn more about blocking time [here](#) and [here](#)).

While most lawyers will be unable to eliminate multitasking or putting out fires entirely, reducing the amount of time spent in reactive mode and using these tips to work more proactively can significantly enhance both productivity and daily job satisfaction.

For more information on the effects of multitasking, take a look at this infographic from Online Universities:

<http://blog.sparkhire.com/2012/06/21/multitasking-our-brain-infographic/>

More Productivity Tips

Here are a few other quick productivity and time management tips:

- Write everything down
- Develop systems for storing the information you save so you can find it easily when you need it
- Use an [editorial calendar](#) to schedule marketing and writing projects
- Invest in resources, technology and/or people to improve your productivity
- Never use your email inbox as your to-do list
- Don't use your email inbox as a place to store communications - file or delete messages
- Set a schedule and stick to it
- Know your "power hours"
- Create workflow checklists
- [Do the worst first](#)
- Use automation tools available in programs you already use
- Don't check email constantly!
- You can get more detail on these tips [here](#), as well as a great list of productivity resources.

And One Final Tip

One of my favorite productivity tips is breaking large projects down into bite-sized pieces. Looking at or thinking about an entire project can be overwhelming, and when we're overwhelmed we tend to procrastinate. But tackling only one small piece of a large project at a time can help build momentum and confidence. And the project is likely to get done much faster.

Find more productivity tips on my website, [Lawyer Meltdown](#), or contact me to find out how I can help you improve your productivity.



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