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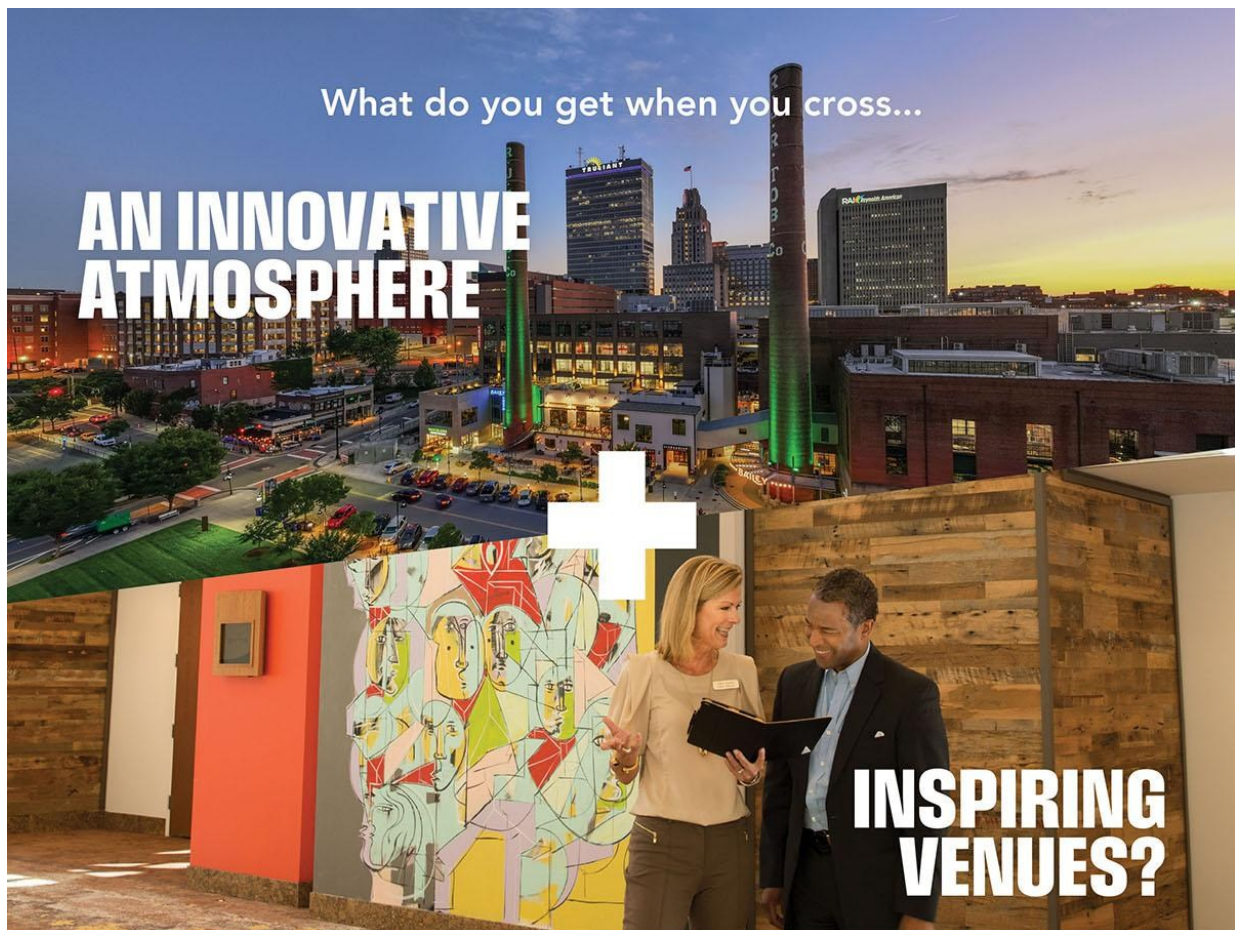
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# The Dangers of Multitasking

Mitch Savoie Hill, CPC, CVP

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## The Dangers of Multitasking

Mitch Savoie Hill, CPC, CVP, CEO | SavHill Consulting



### Are you a great multitasker?

That used to be a key job interview question, with multitasking viewed as a highly valuable strength. How well can you juggle? Can you manage more than one conversation at a time, type up that report while listening to the morning news, and answering your spouse's question about what you want for dinner?

If you are nodding enthusiastically, "Heck Yeah! That's me! I'm a *great* multitasker!"

Or, if like many of the individuals I coach, you struggle with the juggle, the information I am about to share is vital and just may save you time, money, meaningful connections, and *brain health*.

### The Multitasking Illusion

Although it can feel like your success is dependent on your ability to multitask. Neuroscience has discovered that multitasking is not as valuable as we once thought it was. Actually, it can be incredibly detrimental.

I have been in high-stress, intense work environments since I was an 18-year-old singing waitress in New York City. (That is a great story for another time.)

Many jobs, especially in the industries I've worked in— such as hospitality, live events, and real estate management— seem to require us to multitask— perform more than one task at a time. Presently, we are all constantly bombarded with environmental factors vying for our attention— emails, texts, calls, people knocking on our doors— Knock-Knock— "Do you have a quick second?" Which we ALL know never really means just a quick second, right?

So the answer has always seemed to be—

Do It All!

Manage everything everywhere at the same time! Now I know for many of you it seems like that tactic has been working for you, working for a long time.

Here's the problem— Multitasking is a dangerous illusion.

You see, neuroscience has discovered that the brain can only fully focus on one thing at a time - One Thing. I know many of you will protest, but it's true. Can you walk and chew gum at the same time? Sure. Can you have a phone conversation while you are driving? Everybody does, right?

But the dangerous fact is that in that moment, you are *not* completely focused on any one of those tasks. Not completely present. And when you are not completely present in a conversation or an activity, here's what it can cost you:

## The Cost of Multitasking

Let's begin with Time and Money. 23 minutes. That's how long it can take the brain to refocus after an interruption.

I'm going to invite you now to think about how many interruptions you are allowing on any given day? Less than 10? More than 10? Some of you are saying, "10? Try a hundred!"

OK, Now multiply that number by 23 and you may get an idea of how much time and money can be going down the drain in terms of productivity.

We think we're saving time by talking while we're typing, or answering a text while we're walking to our next meeting, but undoubtedly, you will miss details, and those details minimally can cost you and others the time it takes to repeat what should have been caught the first time around, creating double work, wasted time, and frustration. On a grander scale, you may miss a vital detail that costs your company money due to a mistake or misunderstood expectation.

Time and Money - the cost of multitasking.

Next, let's talk about the loss of Loyalty, which can also cost you money in terms of employee and client retention? When we are multitasking, people know they are not fully being engaged, and this can be costly in terms of relationship building, whether personal or professional. Have you ever tried talking to a boss who pretended to listen to you when you could totally tell you were not being taken into full account? How does that make you feel? Dismissed? Unimportant? MAD?

Do you have a family member who does this? It's quite frustrating. You will have a conversation to coordinate some event or pick someone up from the airport, for example, and they will inevitably forget what you told them because they were *not fully listening* in the first place, creating confusion, frustration, and even at times, major familial misunderstandings. Things that eventually erode a relationship and personal loyalties.

Multitasking costs us meaningful connections and therefore the loyalty that comes from those connections.

## Brain Disruption

If all that wasn't enough to convince you, let's talk about how multitasking impairs your overall brain health. What our brains are doing when we multitask is rapidly switching between tasks. This constant switching overtaxes our brain and makes it less efficient. Over time, this diminishes our ability to focus our attention in general, even when we are not multitasking. As we age, the decline happens even faster. Multitasking becomes exponentially detrimental to our cognitive ability.

So what other options does an overtaxed, overworked, busy person have than to multitask? Well, I wouldn't give you the problem without offering some solutions.

## 3 Powerful Tips - A Healthier Solution

Here is the good news about single-task focusing - if you focus on one thing at a time, you will do it more efficiently and effectively, essentially buying you more time. Will it be easy if you have been multitasking all your life? Heck NO! Any new habit takes time and repetition, failure, and recalibration.

But here are 3 things you can start with:

### 1 - Deliberate Scheduling

Schedule specific and focused work time - some of my executive clients call it "Project Time", a time when everyone in the office knows not to interrupt you unless the building is on fire, and even then, their first call should be to the fire department, not you. Schedule in breaks, cushions between calls, and meetings for those who "just need a second." If you find people are constantly interrupting you, tell them what you are doing, how you are creating and maintaining this new, healthier system, and offer times slots wherein people can talk to you. Suggest that they write down all their questions and talking points so you can address them all at once in that one time slot rather than interrupting you 10 times a day with non-urgent matters. I know - This may feel very uncomfortable at first if you are used to a total "Open-Door, Interrupt-Me-Whenever" environment. That's just not efficient for anyone. Just remember and remind others about what's at stake here.

Will it work every time?

Heck NO! Shift happens, emergencies happen - but if all you ever encounter on a daily basis are emergencies, you may benefit from some leadership coaching and changing the way you operate.



Remember, if you model and uphold new, healthier behaviors, systems and habits, people will start to catch on, and hopefully even start doing it themselves.

## 2 - Turning Off Notifications

When in focused work mode, turn off ALL notifications until the end of that focus work time slot. You may need to use Auto-Replies and signs on your door informing people what you are doing and when you will be available again. Remember that even those little dings and phone or watch vibrations act as distractions away from the task at hand and the refocusing clock begins from zero again.

## 3 - Attention Focusing Exercises

Your brain is a muscle. If it's been weakened from many years of multitasking, it will require some exercise to build up your ability to focus. Luckily, we have many resources at our fingertips today to help with this, things like mindfulness apps, classes, and videos. Just take a few minutes in the morning or throughout the day to practice being present through either meditation, breathing exercises, apps that offer mindfulness sessions, or for some of my coaching clients who struggle with "turning it off", I recommend a mindful walk. That is when you take a slow and deliberate walk outside and notice things in the environment, deeply and intently notice the shape of the leaf on that tree, the crack on the sidewalk, the form of the cloud above - pretend you're a detective scouring the environment for clues. This helps with directing & controlling your attention, keeping you ever-present.

### Presence Is Key.

If you want to engage and be engaged, it begins with being fully present. It may take a lot of practice, but when you see the positive effects, you will be motivated to do more. The quality of your work and connections, whether personal or business, will increase and therefore be more impactful.

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Mitch Savoie Hill, CPC is a Certified Professional Coach, TEDx speaker, author, and CEO of SavHill Consulting LLC. With over 25 years of experience in Sales, Hospitality, Training, and Leadership, she delivers engaging and energetic presentations, corporate training sessions, as well as 1:1 coaching to help her clients clarify their vision, map out strategies and Stretch Their Horizons! Find out how Mitch can help you and your team achieve greater productivity, proactivity, and success! *Reach out if you would like to learn more about coaching, team training, or bringing Mitch to speak to your group so that together we can help Stretch Your Horizons!*

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