

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1577 The Importance of Focus – Part 1

Have you ever found yourself feeling scattered and unfocused? Maybe the events of a weekend have had a big impact on you, and you enter the workweek just not ready for your normal productivity level. Maybe it's after a vacation, or if you're distracted by a personal matter. Wait, you're a multitasker, able to do two, three, four things or more at the same time? Surely you can get a bunch of things going simultaneously and work your way out of this, right? I'm Jerry Roberts, and today, we'll look to see if that's the answer, or part of the problem. That's coming next on The Extra Point.

If you're like me and just about everybody else, you'll occasionally struggle to lock in and have total focus on the work you want to do.

The reasons can be variable, but the results are always the same: Productivity takes a nosedive, and then we try to turn that around in any number of ways.

1. Multitasking. Whether workers are really able to amp up their productivity by trying to do many things at once has long been debated. Those in favor of it are adamant that they get more done that way. Others will tell you that multitasking actually fragments our attention and makes it harder to regain focus.

2. The caffeine fix. When many people aren't feeling "with it", they rely upon coffee and energy drinks to bring them back. Of course, it's not just the caffeine, but also considerable amounts of sugar mixed in.

The combination of the two can provide a temporary boost, but the inevitable crash leaves people feeling even more drained and unfocused. What do they do? Usually, they repeat the process. More caffeine and more sugar. The downside that few people recognize is that overusing stimulants can also disrupt sleep and heighten stress levels.

3. Powering through distractions. We grit our teeth and ignore notifications, social media,

and other disruptions. But research shows that those distractions can still impact our memory and cognitive performance, even if we think we're tuning them out. If this doesn't work for us, we may turn to number four.

4. Working longer hours. The instinct for many is to simply put in more time on their work. They take lunch at their desk and maybe take work home if they can, thinking that sheer effort will power them through the slump.

However, research shows that overworking without breaks can lead to burnout, decreased cognitive function, and ironically, even lower productivity.

What's the long term impact? An occasional day when things aren't clicking for us can be dismissed. What if you get three in a row? What if it's two or three days per week? When our personal production begins to fall off, and when it seems like more than just a bad day once in a while, we can become self-critical, or begin to look for excuses why things aren't working. All right, what can we do?

Let's focus on the multitasking aspect. Experts in the area of workplace efficiency often advise "monotasking", doing one thing at a time and seeing if the science behind multitasking holds true.

We may not be able to eliminate all of the many distractions we face daily, but we can discipline ourselves to finish one job before starting another one.

Two other bits of research factor into this. One, we're told that it takes a full 23 minutes to regain our prior focus once we've been distracted.

The other comes from a study at the University of London, which found that subjects who multitasked experienced drops in their IQ comparable to someone who missed a night of sleep.

(Con't.)

There's more. A study that ran MRI scans on multitaskers' brains revealed less density in the areas that control empathy and emotions.

That would seem to indicate that the same issues that cause us trouble on the job, could be causing us problems in other area of our lives.

We'll get back into the topic of focus and productivity with part two tomorrow.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3FM, the Ray Gibson Show, and First Hawaiian Bank, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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