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Senior Product Manager,
SparkCognition

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Johan Axelsson,
CEO



CIO REVIEW
14790, S Fremmer Blvd.
#202, Fremont, CA-94538



Tony Pashigian

Stop Glorifying "BUSY"

By Tony Pashigian, VP, Detroit Manufacturing Systems LLC.

People wear “busy” like a badge of honor. It seems to get worse as technology continues to offer more ways to receive assignments and more ways to perform tasks simultaneously, or “multitasking”. People have lost a sense of the necessity to accomplish and, instead, amass huge task lists that occupy every minute of their busy days. The fact of the matter is that results are the only legal tender in the business world.

Quality of life, whether professional life or personal life, suffers from all of this busy. If every moment is spoken for then there is no buffer for spontaneity and no available bandwidth for contingencies when issues are encountered, which can cost you results. The stress associated with not having the time to recover from issues is not only unhealthy but it can lead to poor judgment in consideration of taking risks and lead to analysis paralysis, which will cause the delay that you were trying to avoid related to the risk.

Getting results starts with a very clear understanding of the objective. Then a credible plan has to be formed to achieve the results. A plan can lose credibility if it doesn't contain all of the steps necessary to achieve the goal; if the tasks are not logically sequenced; or if there is insufficient time to get the job done. It is essential that you understand and respect the critical path of the logically sequenced tasks. If you allow yourself to be distracted with busy work and take your eye off of the critical

path you might, indeed, be busy. However, you are unlikely to accomplish the objective. Sometimes you just have to say “no” to time robbers.

There is no argument that some days and some projects don't allow for anything other than busy. This article is not about those special circumstances, but rather the common cause habit of simply biting off more than you can chew.

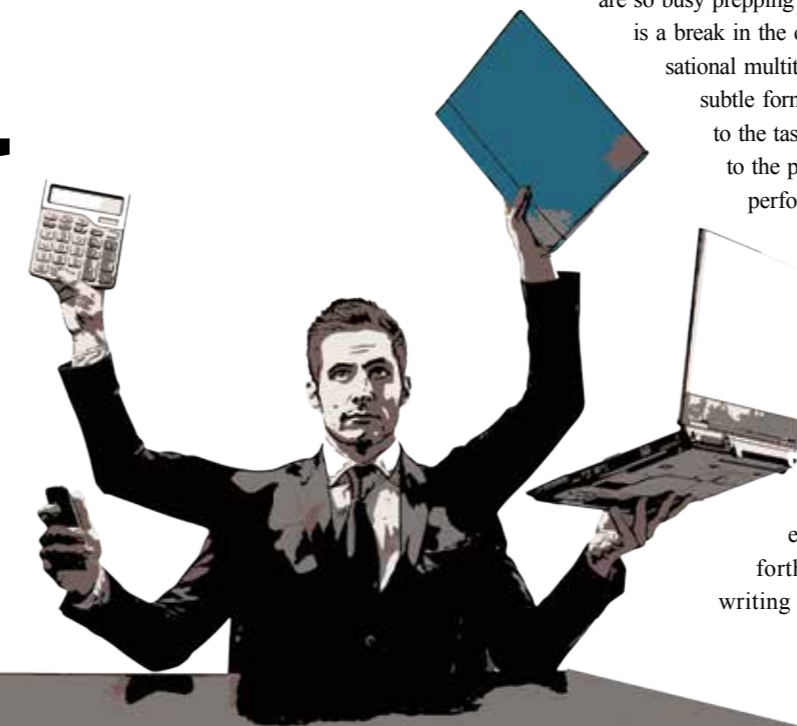
The habit carries over to personal life, too. Kids have little, or no, unstructured playtime. Adults rush from place to place and from activity to activity. At the end, they touch many things but truly immerse themselves in very few.

Multitasking

I'm not sure I've ever met anybody that can truly multitask. No, I don't run in circles of untalented people and am, thereby, cheated out of observing the multitasking phenomenon. There are just very few people that can do many things simultaneously with no loss of efficiency.

In my experience, when someone tells me they are multitasking it means they are doing more than one item at a time, neither of which gets their full attention or is accomplished efficiently. Regardless, this subset of “busy” is a source of pride for the supposed “multitasker” often while they disappoint me right in front of my eyes.

It is akin to trying to explain something to someone and the look on their face tells you they can't wait for their turn to talk and aren't really listening to you. You know they can't be listening and truly using their cognitive abilities to consider your explanation when they are so busy prepping their rebuttal when there is a break in the conversation. It's conversational multitasking. Multitasking is a subtle form of not showing respect to the task at hand and, indirectly, to the person for whom you are performing the task. Conversational multitasking is a much more direct showing of disrespect.



The point is that you are not actually doing two things at the same time, but rather switching back and forth between them. Try writing a detailed email while

talking on the phone to a person on a subject that requires your engagement. Impatience will drive you to try, but ask the person you are talking to if they feel like they have your full attention and I'd wager the answer is “no”. You might be able to kick-the-can down the road on both activities, but you never really get “in the zone” on either of them. It's a special aspect of the desire to be busy. So, we kid ourselves into believing we can do it.



Multitasking is a subtle form of not showing respect to the task at hand

Instead of glorifying the busy feeling of multitasking, we're better off if we focus on efficiently accomplishing one task at a time. It's about accomplishment over activity. It's also about accuracy and the quality of your work, which will improve if the task has your full attention. Question: How many people have you run into in a mall or on a sidewalk because they were too busy texting to actually pay attention to where they were walking? They were busy and they were multitasking.

Getting Lean

The pressure to do more with less is a major contributor to the glorification of “busy”. The fact is that it often amounts to lowering standards and accepting less excellent output. You're so happy to have a task crossed off the list—mostly because that's what you are rewarded for—that you focus on the minimum acceptable output that will get you credit. It's celebrating volume rather than quality. Management has distorted the meaning of lean by morphing it from “eliminating waste” to “forcing people to stretch”.

Get Effective

The bottom line is your “busy-ness” is of no value. You're being paid for outcomes, results or accomplishment rather than how many minutes of your day you can occupy. The same goes for your personal life. The depth of bonds and experiences is what creates memories as opposed to a superficial, whirlwind of activities. Forget busy. Get effective.