The multitasking season is here: Your survival guide



The holidays are framed as a time to shift our focus away from work and towards ourselves and our families. Often, the hustle and bustle of the holiday season creates stress in the calmest of people. Again, we will be provided with a host of options and choices as to how we will spend our time and how we will spend our money.

For most of us, work does not stop just because something called the *holidays* have started. This means that we are faced with a myth and expectation about a time to relax and celebrate, at the same time as dealing with a workload that doesn't decrease and may even increase during this time.

Our answer to this doubling up of demands at work and home is *multitasking* – something we have come to understand as a valuable and virtuous skill in today's fast-paced workforce. Something like online shopping for gifts in one window and answering emails in another may seem like a harmless and productive use of time but is it really? Research suggests that multitasking actually is not as efficient as we once thought and can actually hinder our focus and slow down work. Multitasking often means you are distracted and are not able to give appropriate attention to each task.

As the holidays are a time when demands are coming from all angles —work and social— here are some alternatives to multitasking and some tips to help make what can be a stressful time of the year more enjoyable and manageable.

- **Prioritize daily tasks.** Instead of trying to do it all at once, or just looking at your workload as an undifferentiated mass (which can be panic inducing!), break up your work into tasks and prioritize them. A simple way to prioritize is to group tasks into what you *must do,* what you *should do,* what you would *like to do* and start at the top.
- **Take breaks**. Part of why multitasking is tempting is that focusing on one thing for too long can be taxing. Take regular short breaks but stay on the task you set for yourself until it is done, then move on to the next.
- **Multitask where appropriate.** Multitasking can work for certain things; if one task requires only motor skills and the other uses your mind, it is possible to do both at the same time. This is what allows you to fold laundry while talking on the phone or clean the bathroom while listening to an audiobook.
- **Resist distractions**. Checking your email, your phone and social media are all tempting when you are working but doing so disrupts your focus. Check in once an hour rather than being connected at all times to improve your focus.
- **Take a few days off**. Taking time for yourself is most important especially as the year wraps up. Enjoying some of the statutory holidays around Christmas and New Year's might help you pause and reflect on your home life. At the same time, going into work when most of your colleagues are off can be an amazing way to get some work done in rare solitude.
- **Keep your work at work and home at home.** During the holiday season, your home life demands will probably be intensified. Now more than ever is a time to make sure you don't bring your work home. By the same token, when you are at work, focus on work and not on recipes or gift-buying lists.
- **Don't over commit.** Probably you will receive a lot of invitations this time of year. Say yes only to the ones you really want or need to attend and don't be afraid to say no to others. You can't be everywhere, so avoid spreading yourself too thin and saying yes to everything.

Implementing these tips will help you avoid some of the pitfalls that lead to an overly stressful holiday season and actually allow you to enjoy yourself. Remember to take care of yourself during this time that way you will be more available to your family and to your workplace.

If you are feeling overwhelmed or lonely this holiday season, let us help. Your EFAP can provide you with immediate, confidential expert support at no cost to you, anytime, anywhere.