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4 Startling Reasons Single-Project Focus Won't Make You Finish Faster

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4 Comments



Need to get something important done? The obvious answer is to clear your schedule as far as possible of everything else.

Or is it?

I recently set aside a month to focus on redesigning my website.

I got it done.

But the ratio between the hours I spent and my productivity wasn't as high as I imagined.

In the first week to 10 days, I got loads done and I was feeling pretty pleased with myself.

While I couldn't dedicate 100% of my working hours to redesigning my website, I made a really coherent plan and I substantially reduced my other commitments.

I thought was going to make my target finishing date without problem.

But I was in for a nasty shock: Over the course of the month my productivity gradually dropped lower and lower.

I'd followed all the advice about focussing intensely on one project so why was I lagging behind?

Here's what I think was going on:

1. Peak Productivity

You read online a lot that non-interrupted creative time is the best. But exactly how *much* uninterrupted time?

The time we spend focussing on something is crucial. In his book **The Way We're Working Isn't Working**, Tony Schwartz found that the most successful creative people work in 45 min blocks for not more than 4 hours a day.

Its a plain old fact that our productivity drops the longer we spend doing the same task. Fresh enthusiasm is important!

2. The Monoculture Effect

Monoculture is when we clear a field of everything but one crop. And we all know what happens with that don't we? Genetically modified crops and mass pesticide spraying anyone?

What we learn from monoculture is that cross-pollination is actually a healthy thing. It makes our inner creative bees hum. We need to get stimulation from various sources because true creativity happens at the intersection between our work and our passions.

3. Can't See the Wood for the Trees

There's no creative project that doesn't hit snags and sometimes even major problems.

So how are these best dealt with?

- By sitting fixed in one place (usually in front of a screen), obsessed with finding a solution?
- By neglecting our health - food, exercise - and our social life and/or family?

I'm sure you can guess that the answer is no! Instead, we find answers to problems taking a shower, going for a walk in nature, or digging out weeds.

Why?

Because problem-solving happens in our subconscious not our conscious mind. We need to **leave space for it to do its work**.

4. Wired to Switch

Another popular internet truism is that constantly switching from one task to another is inefficient because it requires us to recalibrate each time.

What this doesn't take into account is that our brains are wired to switch from one task to another. (Gathering edible plants in the forest when a bear appears, anyone?)

Of course if we're constantly fighting interruptions and never get to focus intensely on anything, our productivity will go through the floor.

But a little switching is a healthy thing. It keeps us feeling fresh and it's another way we cross-pollinate and activate our subconscious.

Make varied focus work for you

So next time you've got a big project to tackle, don't make the same mistake I did and wipe your schedule of everything else.

Definitely block in regular sessions in which you exclusively on your project, but leave space around them for cross-fertilisation, doing less mentally-demanding tasks, and subconscious problem-solving.

I think you'll be surprised by how much your productivity soars!