Its crunch time, 9:00 pm on a Sunday night, and you’ve waited till the last minute for a project. Unfortunately, instead of working diligently you’re caught up on your phone. 9:00 pm turns into 12:00 am without a moments notice its 2:00 am. In todays cyber linked age, the slightest tweet, text, and poke makes it hard to keep focus on any task. Continuously switching one’s focus causes one to only partially take in info in between them. The constant switching of tasks coupled with distractions also makes focus a struggle to keep .However, there are ways to organize ones tasks to save time and prevent stress.

Sarah Sparks, writer for *Education Week*, wrote the article “Studies on Multitasking Highlight Value of Self-Control” about the myth of multitasking. Many people believe that multitasking is a speeder approach to organizing and completing tasks. Larry D. Rosen, who is a psychology professor at California State University, also mentions that the idea that multitasking is the best solution is commonly found among teen age groups, an average of 13- 18 years olds use 6 types of media as a distraction outside of school. With media being available 24/7 it causes a mass distraction that results in a constant tendency to partially pay attention to everything. Each task requires a decision; this process of prioritizing takes longer for the brain to react when it’s constantly being switched between tasks. Steven G. Yantis, a chairman of the psychological and brain department John Hopkins University explains that text, e-mail, and phone call alerts can also break ones focus during a present task. The disturbance of an alert can cause one to change focus to the alerted message or call, can make one change focus to answer, then after answering the individual will have to switch back to the previous task requiring re-focus (Yantis). Additionally, it is presumed that taking one task at a time is more effective and quicker in fact. Sparks notes that choosing to complete one task at a time will make one able to fully give the selected task its full attention and quicken reaction time between choices. Having to make a choice effects reaction time, which can delay students from finishing tasks, and not be able to fully take in the information from a previous task. A study of multitasking and reaction time was established by Stanford University called the Marshmallow test. The Marshmallow test was set up with 4 year olds given a marshmallow to eat, and being able to resist the urge to eat the marshmallow placed in front of them for 15 minutes for the exchange of 2 sweets. A team of researchers led by Rosen randomly assigned 185 college students to participate in a test similar to the Marshmallow test involved texting during a video giving instruction. When it came to attention and memory the tests frequent multitaskers were easily distracted resulting in poor performance compared to those who rarely multitasked. Those who took less than 5 minutes to reply to the messages sent to them scored with 75% correct, but the testers who did not respond at all scored with 85% correct. Working memory depends on how well you can keep out high-value distractions that slows performance (Sparks). I had my own experience with multitasking and distraction, which took place in high school proving Sarah Sparks’ article to be correct.

I made the common mistake of doing my homework during another class. My procrastination lead me to start my Geometry homework in my U.S. History class during instruction. I had my Geometry work completed, but I missed important notes in U.S. History trying to focus on both at once. I used to try to do an equation and take notes from slides in U.S. History, but because of my poor math skills I ended up putting my full focus on my math work. “I’m not gonna wait last minute this time!” I said to myself before the next day, but I’d always procrastinate anyway. My U.S. History grade suffered which caused me to re-take second semester. Sparks article said that multitasking could cause one to only partially focus on anything in the pursuit to juggle multiple tasks. My need to pass both Geometry and U.S. History made me only pass one of the two classes because of my lack of concentration in the other. My partial focus showed that one’s brain couldn’t be in two places at once. After high school, now in college, I am still participating in multitasking but in a different way. Instead of doing homework in different classes I try to mix my homework with leisure activities. For example, I’d be in the middle of an art project but try to be on Face Time, or I’ll try to have my TV on while doing homework to fill in the silence. However, I still get distracted by one task concealing out the other causing my time of completion to dwindle, which means I need a better way to organize my tasks.

One goes through life in pursuit to balance his or her tasks and time in an efficient way. However, deciding which tasks are important and or urgent is the battle many people face. Brett McKay and Kate McKay, on their website *The Art of Manliness*, wrote an article titled “The Eisenhower Decision Matrix: How to Distinguish Between Urgent and Important Tasks and Make Real Progress in Your Life” about the Eisenhower Decision Matrix that was created by Stephen Covey. The idea of the matrix comes from former U.S. General and President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s successful skills in decision-making and his legendary quote “What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important.” (McKay and McKay). The article explained that important tasks contributed to long-term goals and values while urgent tasks required immediate attention. Covey’s decision matrix consists of four quadrants that are designed to help one decide on which tasks are more important based on priorities. Quadrant 1 consists of tasks that are urgent and important such as: term paper deadlines, medical emergencies, and car troubles. The pressing matter of Q1 tasks make them seem important though in reality they’re just something that came up. Quadrant 2 consists of tasks that are not urgent but important such as: studying, exercising, and family time making these tasks a big difference in the long run. Many put Q2 tasks on the back burner as “I’ll get across that bridge when I get to It.” tasks, however, these tasks are consisted the most important tasks because of the long-term differences they serve in life. Quadrant 3 tasks are classified as not important but urgent these tasks benefit others such as: texts, calls, emails, and chores. People tend to spend a lot of time in Q3 and think that they are doing Q2 tasks because they’re helping out others but end up putting their goals on delay (Covey). Tasks in Quadrant 4 are not urgent nor are they important, such as: watching TV, shopping, social media, and overall time wasters. However, one shouldn’t completely cut out Q4’s from their life for they come in handy as well deserved rests after Q2’s or any other tasks (McKay and McKay). To balance my own time I myself have tried the Eisenhower Decision Matrix.

At first I thought to myself “This crap won’t work.” but after really realizing the difference to what is important and urgent has helped organize my time. For starters I listed my Quadrant 2 tasks because it is the most productive quadrant, and will benefit me in the long run. I tried to keep my Quadrant 4 tasks to a minimum so I wouldn’t waste my time needlessly, and kept my Quadrant 1, 2, and 3 tasks balanced in number. After I listed all of my tasks in their quadrants the results were sufficient because of the time I had saved. Looking at the 2nd quadrant on my matrix I noticed that I had ample, yet pending, time for all my assignments. I have finished all my projects and papers way before their due dates and I am able to go to Quadrants 1, 3, and 4 freely without hesitation of worry of Quadrant 2 dead lines making my college life more structured. Although, I had good results from using the Eisenhower Decision Matrix it will be hard to not slip into old slacker habits. Habits such; waiting last minute to type, start –finish a project and cramming are hard to broke and require discipline.

Distractions are everywhere and needless to say unavoidable. In order to keep productivity in ones life is completely up to an individual. One could use the Eisenhower Matrix, but it may not stick or be efficient. A person could try multitasking, but that may lead to failure as well. Everyone’s take on distractions and tasks is different along with their ways to organize them. In order to fully be able to balance time and keep distractions to a minimum one should ask, “Will I thank myself later if I do this now?”

Works Cited

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