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# STREET DOGS: The organised mind

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**Multitasking is a powerful and diabolical illusion as our brains are not wired to do several things a once**

*From The Organized Mind by Daniel Levitin:* Although we think we're doing several things at once, multitasking, this is a powerful and diabolical illusion. Earl Miller, a neuroscientist at MIT and one of the world experts on divided attention, says our brains are "not wired to multitask well... When people think they're multitasking, they're actually just switching from one task to another very rapidly. And every time they do, there's a cognitive cost in doing so."

We're not actually keeping a lot of balls in the air like an expert juggler; we're more like a bad amateur plate spinner, frantically switching from one task to another, ignoring the one that is not right in front of us but worried it will come crashing down any minute. Even though we think we're getting a lot done, ironically, multitasking makes us demonstrably less efficient.

Multitasking has been found to increase the production of the stress hormone cortisol as well as the fight-or-flight hormone adrenaline, which can overstimulate your brain and cause mental fog or scrambled thinking. Multitasking creates a dopamine-addiction feedback loop, effectively rewarding the brain for losing focus and for constantly searching for external stimulation.

To make matters worse, the prefrontal cortex has a novelty bias, meaning that its attention can be easily hijacked by something new. The irony here for those of us who are trying to focus amid competing activities is clear: the very brain region we need to rely on for staying on task is easily distracted. Instead of reaping the big rewards that come from sustained, focused effort, we reap empty rewards from completing a thousand little sugar-coated tasks.

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