

# MULTITASKING: THE PROS AND CONS

By Debbie Williams

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Currently there is a lot of talk in the media about a safety issue: should cell phone owners be allowed to talk on their cell phones while driving? Is it safe to ban use during drive time, or is that infringing upon the rights of private citizens with good driving records? This topic is controversial, to say the least, and since I am not the owner of a cellular phone, I won't open it up for debate in this article.

However, driving and talking on the telephone could be considered the ultimate in multi-tasking, and since I am a big fan of multi-tasking in certain contexts, I'd like to talk about the pros and cons of practicing this time management skill at work and home.

If you've even attended a time management seminar, read a book about organizing your life, or picked up a business magazine, you've read that it's a big time-saver to do two (or more) things at once. I personally recommend it to my readers and the clients that I consult, but feel that there is a time and a place for everything, pros and cons to each circumstance.

**PRO:** It can be productive to check your calendar or PDA while your computer boots up each morning, or to catch up on filing while you are placed on hold before speaking with a customer on the telephone.

**CON:** It is not only unproductive, but distracting, to write an article or content for your website while closing a sales deal on the phone. Not only do you stand the chance of missing crucial nonvisual cues or hesitations in the voice on the other end of the phone, but you could easily make typos and write bad copy for your web design project.

Unlike the brief glance at your calendar or simple filing, each of the latter tasks requires higher thinking skills, providing ample opportunity for error.

**PRO:** At home, you may want to talk to a friend or relative on the phone while ironing your clothes, since ironing requires little active cognitive ability on your part. However,

**CON:** Talking to your insurance rep while helping your daughter with her math homework could be just a bit distracting to everyone involved, especially if you both start quoting numbers!

See the pattern? It's easy for those of you who are rushed and trying to get everything on your to-do lists done, to save time and do things simultaneously. But anything worth doing is worth doing well, as they say, and you alone are the judge of what will suffer as the result of your rushed pace and misplaced attentions.

Some of us are better at doing two or more things at once than others. This is not exclusive to women or mothers - my husband is much better than I at doing several things at once, and easily filters out distractions. Maybe it's the selective hearing that he has developed over the years as a member of a large family, or from all those years working in cubicles crammed with three or four coworkers elbow to elbow. Whatever the reason, it's a gift that I wish I shared.