

Extreme multitasking

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People are now being expected to fit many more jobs into their roles.

We've weathered the downturn, said goodbye to many colleagues, but who is left to do all their work?

Welcome to the world of extreme multi-tasking, where fewer staff must juggle a multitude of tasks to achieve the same level of productivity.

Many employees are being expected to squeeze many more functions into their jobs and as Anne Kadet writes in [Smart Money](#), it's pretty much the way of the future.

"Companies' new solutions to staffing and budget shortfalls often look surprisingly makeshift, with engineers going on sales calls, accountants pitching in on customer service and CFOs running a division on the side," Kadet writes.

"And some believe the shift is permanent, as the quickening pace of change demands more flexibility from everyone at the office."

Management consultant Rich Moran, whose clients have included Apple and AT&T, says many employees will do whatever it takes to help their company compete: "Job descriptions are written in sand, and the wind is blowing. Some workplace experts say the superjob is the logical next step in management's quest to make the workplace more cost-efficient. The latest shift started when businesses redistributed the workload over a smaller pool of employees."

But many experts claim that multitasking doesn't actually work, and just makes people more inefficient.

Writing in the [Harvard Business Review](#), Peter Bregman says multitasking can result in a 40 per cent drop in productivity and 10 per cent drop in IQ. "What we neglect to realise is that we're already using that brain power to pick up nuance, think about what we're hearing, access our creativity, and stay connected to what's happening around us," Bregman says. "It's not really extra brain power. And diverting it has negative consequences."

To put it simply, our brains aren't wired up to do too many things at once, something that I wrote about [here](#).



Holly Green at [Forbes](#) says multitasking not only makes us less efficient, it leaves us less creative and more stressed, lowering job satisfaction and causing all sorts of problems in personal relationships. It also happens to be addictive as people seem to get a rush from the constant stimulation. “Clearly, multitasking does not produce the results we hope for or intend,” Green writes. “Instead, it actually works against the goals we’re trying to achieve.”

So how do we say no to the boss when we are asked to perform those extra tasks? Blogger Suzanne Lucas, otherwise known as [Evil HR Lady](#) has some good [suggestions](#). She says there are seven things to consider: is it important for the success of the business, can you give something else up, is it easy for you to do, is it temporary or permanent, what’s in it for you, is it reasonable or unreasonable, is the boss a rational person?

If you’re going to say no, she suggests not doing it immediately but thinking it over carefully, coming up with an alternate plan and showing how your time is valuable elsewhere. She concedes that it’s not an easy decision. “Your boss wants you to think that she has all the power in a situation like this, but keep in mind it’s far more expensive to recruit, hire and train someone than it is to hire a plumber for a couple of hours. But, also remember that if the company goes under because people weren’t willing to take on additional tasks, you’ll be just as unemployed.”

Has your job description changed meaning you have to do more with less? And if so, how has it affected your performance?

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/executive-style/management/blogs/management-line/extreme-multitasking-20110514-1encv.html#ixzz1NBmC7Mpc>