

**Your Mind on Media Newsletter:
Mindus Interruptus: Distractions Are Costlier Than You Think!
(c) Joanne Cantor, Ph.D., February 29, 2012**

Do you hear anyone complaining that they have too much time on their hands? Of course not. Everyone seems to have too much to do and not enough hours in the day to accomplish everything -- much less have time to relax.

But recent research I described in my latest post on *Psychology Today* points to a solution: Stop letting yourself be interrupted. In this research, college students read a five-page article online under one of three conditions. One group was interrupted five times by short instant messages (IMs) that they were supposed to answer; a second group didn't receive any IMs although they were told beforehand that they might get them; a third group got the IMs in advance so they knew they wouldn't be interrupted while reading.

The results were dramatic. The students who knew they would not be interrupted finished the article in 29 minutes; those who thought they might be interrupted (but weren't) took 37 minutes; and those who were interrupted by IMs took 46 minutes (and this doesn't include the 3 minutes they spent reading and answering the IMs!). The three groups performed similarly on a test of recall afterwards.

What does this tell you? You can save lots of time by avoiding interruptions from emails, texts, IMs, phone calls, etc. It's not just the time you spend dealing with the interruption; there's an enormous cost involved in getting back into the train of thought you dropped when the interruption came. Being interrupted increased reading time by 59%, compared knowing you wouldn't be interrupted. The time lost was more than 5 times as long as the time spent on the side activity.

So, whether you're a student or a professional or you just need to read and understand something, turn off your alerts when you need to concentrate. When you're done, you can use the time you save to catch up with your contacts or do something fun and relaxing!

For more details, see my *Psychology Today* Post
(see link to my *Psychology Today* blog on my home page)

Recent Sightings:

- "How I'm Reclaiming My Focus by Turning Out of Social Media in the *Toronto Star*.
- "All Work, No Play" in *Himal Southasian Magazine*.
- Interview for Guerilla Project Management
- Coverage in *ComputerCare: Useful Technology for Your Business*
- Coverage in "Alone Time" in Goals Gone Social.

I just got back from Las Vegas, where I did a keynote for Pink Elephant's International Conference on IT Service Management. The 1500 attendees have the job of making sure that the information technology systems they design function well for the employees and customers of their organizations. The response of the audience confirmed that cyberoverload is a major problem for these folks, and they were happy to understand how information overload affects their brains and grateful to receive simple strategies for sanity and success.

Making These Ideas Work for You

Having honed my presentation skills by teaching college undergraduates for 26 years, I know that to keep people focused and help them change their behavior, you need to involve your audience actively. That's why my presentations are full of brain exercises and other learning activities that drive home the points I'm making and make them both accessible and memorable.

The people in your business, association, or school can also benefit from the interactive activities in my keynotes. Email or call me (608-347-9516) to learn about how we can help them succeed and thrive in the Internet age. Or go to the Speaking section of my website to explore the various programs I can offer on increasing productivity, maximizing creativity, and reducing stress.