

This column took longer to write than it should have. Stuff kept getting in the way: impromptu meetings, phone calls, online presidential poll numbers that insisted on being checked *right now*, and, of course, e-mail, always more e-mail, e-mail that stops you in the middle of whatever you're thinking about or focusing on and yanks you over to Microsoft Outlook, or whatever, to see who wrote you and why, even when you *know* it won't be important.

I'm better off than most—I've uninstalled instant messaging on my computer and refused to buy a BlackBerry or even a cell phone—and yet that inbox always beckons, beckons.



How do any of us get *anything* done? As Jim Krohe points out in this issue's cover story (page 42), every time we get distracted, it takes a substantial amount of time to wrench us back to the chore we were doing before. There's no such thing as multitasking, not really—we shift focus from one task to another and, in the process, fail to give any of them our full attention. At a time when business challenges require deeper concentration, we're scattered and unfocused and nowhere near as productive as we think we are when it comes to knowledge work.

Yes, there are efforts, by Google and others, to make it easier for us to police our Internet use and e-mail addiction and force us to take breaks. But the fault lies not in our software but in ourselves, and Krohe explains why—and what we can do to reclaim our attention spans in the office.

One good way to boost productivity that he doesn't discuss: Put yourself in a room with a few carefully selected colleagues, a narrow and focused agenda, and some ground rules—in particular, that you hold each other accountable to get the job done. A roundtable discussion, published as "Think Horizontal" (page 52), explores how teams can be key to solving business problems quickly and responsibly.

And though you may be justifiably anxious about committing to more meetings, these don't have to be your typical meetings—you know, convening and adjourning and convening and adjourning without a whole lot of direction. With planning and accountability, team meetings can launch, focus, gather information, make recommendations, and dissolve. The result: faster decision-making, with a level of transparency that leaves everyone comfortable with those decisions.

As long as you ban PDAs from the conference room.

Last, I'd like to welcome aboard senior editor Daniel K. Eisenbud—the first new staffer to join the magazine in eight years. Dan brings with him a good deal of enthusiasm as well as experience in financial journalism and in shaping magazine content, and you'll be seeing his name regularly in these pages.

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