

Mind on Task: A Story About Distraction

We all face stressors in our lives every day: ailing family members, financial troubles, mental illness, addictions, family troubles, physical illness, among other things. Even the good things can add to our day-to-day stress: buying a house, having our first child, getting a pet, getting a promotion, starting an education program. We have been faced with the pandemic, like the rest of the world, while also being hit with unprecedented summer temperatures, wildfire, severe flooding, and now our industry is seeing layoffs and uncertainty going forward due to all these factors and changes to government policy. It is only natural that we would have a lot on our minds. I would like to ask you to listen to the following scenario and consider whether you have ever been in a similar situation either at work or outside of it.

I am on my way home after a long day, but I need to make a few stops in town first. It is a few days away from the holidays and I need to pick up a few last-minute gifts and fixings for dinner. On my way into town, I start running over the to do list in my mind. Recounting what I need to buy, thinking of extra things that I need to add to the list, considering what I have left to do to prepare before my guests arrive. Cleaning, cooking, shopping, organizing, decorating, wrapping, that argument I had with my dad last month, working, the overtime I couldn't work this year to prepare for the added costs of the holidays, my first Christmas without my mom.

As I pull into town, with all these thoughts in my mind, I begin to plan my route. Efficiency is key, there is still so much to do. I pass through a green light, looking ahead at the options to turn into town. As I am approaching a 4 way stop ahead, I am trying to decide if I should turn or go straight. I need to pick up a parcel, I look at the time, the post office will close soon, and I decide to go there first. I decide to go straight and forget to stop, driving past the stop sign and into the busy intersection....

Now consider our time at work, the stressors don't go away when we enter the front doors. So, if we are thinking of these things while we are in the car, we are probably thinking of these things while we are performing our work. There is no shame in this, we are all only human and when our brains are full something must give. Chances are it is the things we know the best that will go into autopilot.

What I am asking is that we pause for a minute and recognize these thoughts and distractions because that story could be about me, it could be about you, the scenarios aren't exact but it's the result that matters. Life isn't always pretty and though we may wish we had the ability to turn off the problems in our lives when we head off to work, the reality is that we can't. We must recognize this, adapt if we can, and be honest if we can't.