TIPS FOR TALKING TO UNDERGRADUATES ABOUT THRIVING ON CAMPUS AND IN CYBERSPACE

© Joanne Cantor, Ph. D.

1. **EMPATHIZE** – Acknowledge that the digital distractions they're up against are much more difficult than anything we experienced when we were in college. You're dealing with some of the same issues.

2. **INVOLVE THEM** – Show them what the problems are by engaging them in brain exercises that demonstrate the problems of multitasking, task-switching, and information overload. They're more likely to take to heart what they observe in themselves.

3. **RECOMMEND BALANCE** rather than abstinence – Alternating between focus and relaxation and work and play. Workaholism is not as effective as balance. And the worst of all is multitasking all day long: They reduce their academic effectiveness and never have a chance to enjoy themselves.

4. **SUGGEST HEALTHY, EASY WAYS TO ENHANCE THEIR CREATIVITY AND PRODUCTIVITY** – like exercise, nature, and sleep. These are available to everyone.

5. **ENCOURAGE STRESS REDUCTION** – as a way to improve educational outcomes as well as a way to promote healthier lives.

For More Information:

www.yourmindonmedia.com

Conquer CyberOverload: Get More Done, Boost Your Creativity, and Reduce Stress
available at Amazon.com and yourmindonmedia.com

Special Report:
"Making the Most of Your Time and Your Talents
by Decluttering Your Digital Domain"
on web site with free monthly email newsletter

Handouts for students

To inquire about Joanne Cantor visiting your campus to talk to students,
academic advisors, or orientation staff,
call 608-221-0593 or email cantor@yourmindonmedia.com

TIPS FOR CONQUERING CYBEROVERLOAD
(from *Conquer CyberOverload*)

PRACTICAL STEPS ❶

Be the Master of Your Interruptions

Of course, you can't focus solidly on one thing all day, but YOU CAN be the one to decide when the interruptions come.

When you need to get things done, create a time-specified private zone and limit interruptions from other people:

- Decide which people are your drop-everything contacts and find a way for them to get through to you in all circumstances.
- Turn your email off, and schedule email-checking breaks every two hours (or whatever interval works for you) or at a natural break in your work.
- Check phone messages on a limited schedule (if necessary, put your message-checking schedule in your outgoing message)—or make judicious use of caller-ID for emergencies.
- Use a "do not disturb" sign or "be back at _____" sign. Let people know when you'll be available and they're more likely to tolerate your withdrawal.

PRACTICAL STEPS ❸

Some Brain-Enhancing Ways to Promote Creativity

- Immerse yourself in as much information as you can for a sustained period, but know when to stop gathering new information and start looking for connections within what you have.
- When you hit an impasse, break away to relax your intense focus on the information you have collected.
- Choose a break of the low-information variety (avoid TV, the Internet, messaging); don't just add more information to an already overwhelmed memory capacity
- Involve some form of physical exercise in your break, be it walking on a treadmill, playing Ping-Pong, taking a walk outside, or even walking around in your office building.
- If possible, take your break in a natural environment like a park or the woods.
- Find a way to introduce a time for sleep within your creative process. This could mean taking a nap, or simply making sure that your project carries over from one day to the next, and that you return to your project first thing in the morning.

Things to remember:

★Your brain is designed to work best focusing on one thing at a time, but to be easily distractible.
★Your brain can't multitask its attention; it can only switch back and forth between tasks, and when it does, both tasks suffer.
★Working memory is the bottleneck.
★Information overload blocks creativity and problem solving.
★Stress interferes with cognitive functioning.
★When you find yourself multitasking, remember the Cantor Test, and think about "dimming your bulb."
★When you "can't see the forest for the trees" in a problem, think about that too-full jar of jelly beans -- and take a brain-enhancing break.

© Joanne Cantor, yourmindonmedia.com; 608-221-0593; cantor@yourmindonmedia.com

[HANDOUT FOR STUDENTS]

Thriving on Campus and in Cyberspace
© Tips from Professor Joanne Cantor

Before multitasking in class or while studying, ask yourself: Do I want to dumb down my brain for this? Do I want to spend more time than necessary on this? Do I want to have very little memory for what I've just done? Do I want to do a poorer job? If you can answer yes to all four questions, go ahead and multitask!

Ignore your digital distractors until it's a good time for a break, and let your friends know when they can reach you. Feel good about single-tasking, knowing how much faster and better you're working. Save your entertainment for when you can enjoy it. You'll have much more time for it! Single-focus may be hard at first, but it works wonders when you get the hang of it.

Be sure to take breaks when your brain gets too full of information. Getting exercise brings oxygen to your brain, refreshes it, and allows good ideas to surface.

Interacting with nature on a break from studying or writing a paper allows your brain to keep churning your ideas without you thinking about them.

Sleeping well makes you more alert (of course). But Sleeping AFTER studying makes you learn it better. Sleeping in the middle of a project or paper makes you come up with better solutions and more creative ideas. Your brain is working on your problem when you're snoozing. Sleeping well even helps prevent weight gain!

Stay connected with your friends, but cooperate so you can give each other uninterrupted time to get things done efficiently and have more time to socialize. Make friends with people in your classes and study together.

Have fun! Don't be a workaholic. Fun and friends are important! And they help you cope. Schedule your day so you can build in times devoted to relaxation and fun. Don't procrastinate so long that you feel guilty about relaxing.

Let me know how this works for you: jrcantor@wisc.edu

For more information, see my website: www.yourmindonmedia.com

My Psychology Today Blog:
www.psychologytoday.com/blog/conquering-cyber-overload

or my new book:
Conquer CyberOverload: Get More Done, Boost Your Creativity, and Reduce Stress

[contact cantor@yourmindonmedia.com for permission to copy]

[Multitasking Exercise]

	Oh, say can you see, by the dawn's early light, what so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming.
Single-task	(1)
	Hickory dickory dock. The mouse ran up the clock. The clock struck one, the mouse ran down. Hickory dickory dock.
	(2)
	Oh, say can you see, by the dawn's early light, what so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming.
Multi-task	(3)
	Hickory dickory dock. The mouse ran up the clock. The clock struck one, the mouse ran down. Hickory dickory dock.
	(4)

Instructions: 1. Time yourself while writing the top two excerpts, one after another, in the spaces beneath them [spaces (1) and (2)]. Write down the total time elapsed. _____.

2. Time yourself while multitasking (task-switching) the same two excerpts, but this time, switch tasks after every word. In other words, write "Oh" in line 3, then write "Hickory" in line 4; then go back to line 3 and write "say," return to line 4 and write "dickory"; return to line 3 and write "can," and so on until the end. Write down your time. _____. Compare it to your single-tasking time; look at your handwriting; compare your error rates. How many times did you say to yourself, "where was I?" Compare your stress levels.

3. Try repeating the multitasking exercise without pencil or paper, just reciting the two expressions from memory. WARNING: Don't try this while driving a car or operating heavy machinery!

Your Mind on Media, www.yourmindonmedia.com
From *Conquer CyberOverload: Get More Done, Boost Your Creativity, and Reduce Stress*
© Joanne Cantor, Ph.D. – Contact cantor@yourmindonmedia.com for permission to copy