

Multitasking Moms Telesummit
Lain Ehmann: Multitasking Is Not a Dirty Word
April, 2010

Intro: Welcome to today's call with me, Lain Ehmann. The topic is "Multitasking Is Not A Dirty Word!"

I'll read my bio to you because I'm not used to tooting my own horn: A former editor for Simple Scrapbooks Magazine and Selling Power Magazine, I have written over 5000 articles for magazines ranging from Runner's World to the Industry Standard. I am the author of two books: Snippets: Mostly True Tales from the Lighter Side of Scrapbooking (CKMedia, 2009) and Simple Secrets of Happy Scrapbookers (Ella Publishing Co., 2009), which I co-authored with Stacy Julian. I am also the co-founder of Ella Publishing, the first online publisher in the crafting industry.

Now, as a ball-juggling, multitasking mom, I share my tips for creating a fun and nurturing family at 30 Minute Martha. I wanted to teach women that caring for a home doesn't have to be stressful or overwhelming, but is best done with a spirit of laughter and learning. One of my best teaching tools is my experience – both successes and failures! With all my various awards and accolades, my most proud accomplishments are my three children, and my occasional ability to complete the entire New York Times Sunday crossword in pen.

When not vacuuming, reading, or making plans, I can be found knitting, scrapbooking, cooking, and waiting for spring to come in Lexington, MA.

There's a big trend right now towards mindfulness, and the power of doing less. Books like Getting Things Done and The Power of Less encourage us to actually cut down on the number of things we do, telling us we'll actually get more done as a result.

Now that's all well and good – but the thing that strikes me is that most of these books are written by men. Men who traditionally have been able to go to work, close the door to their office, and focus on one task at a time until completion.

That is not my reality and I bet it's not yours either.

Nature and evolution have prepared women to be multitaskers. Physiologically, we have more connections between the hemispheres of our brains, which means we're hard-wired to keep track of multiple things at the same time. And sure, while it might be ideal to be able to shut everything off and focus in on one task at a time, it's not reality for most moms.

We **HAVE** to multitask. We need to be juggling numerous tasks and priorities not only throughout the day, but at any given time. We're taking in new information and seeing how it fits with all the other tasks we have to do, rearranging and reallocating mental and physical space. Our days are less like the notes of a melody, one after another, than they are a crowded refrigerator shelf, where we have to move the ketchup over here so we have room for the leftovers over there. We combine two half-empty containers of milk so we create more space for the bottle of orange juice our husband brought home.

But while we're hardwired to multitask, we can make some big blunders that make our lives harder instead of easier. So today I wanted to present you with the ten biggest mistakes multitasking moms make.

Write out down edge of paper

M – Making things too hard. Not only are we too hard on ourselves, we often look for the hardest way to do something instead of finding the easiest. If we have to bring treats for our daughter's soccer team, we immediately envision cupcakes baked from scratch, hand-decorated with soccer ball icing made from rolled fondant and enscribed with each girl's name and jersey number. Some days, we might be able to do that. But most of the

time, we don't HAVE the time. And most of the time, just getting it done is more than enough.

Woody Allen said that 80 percent of success is showing up. That's true! If we just get what we're supposed to do, done, and on time, that's enough. Then we can save our energy for the times that a little extra is going to go a long way – the times that are special for our families.

U – Underusing technology. We're linked to our email and computers, but are we using them to our best advantage? We need to find ways for technology to help us use time, not spend more. And this goes for everything from creating reusable shopping lists on our computers, to recording TV shows on our Tivos, to creating a blog for our extended family members to stay in better contact, to using Google Docs and Google calendars to keep track of our comings and goings as a family. Here are some big ways you can save big time:

- Create folders in your inbox. I get 100-plus emails a day. I cannot read them all immediately. I sort them into folders so I can keep track of what's going on and what's the highest priority.
- Use your Crockpot! This can save you HOURS a week! There are tons of great websites and cookbooks and it is really, really simple.
- Get rid of your TV. You can watch nearly everything on DVDs, Hulu, or iTunes. It will save you tons of time.
- Create reusable worksheets and lists for chores, kids' schedules and activities, etc. For instance, create a reusable grocery list and hang it inside the kitchen cabinet or on the fridge. Check off things you need to buy.
- Get rid of your cookbooks. It is much easier to google a recipe than it is to leaf through fifteen cookbooks, looking for the perfect recipe for potatoes au gratin.
- Get a GPS navigator! This has saved me so much stress... Baseball info.

L – Letting things pile up. Whether it's laundry or chores or errands or things to talk about with your spouse, we can ignore the little things until they become debilitating or huge obstacles.

Try to address things in the moment – or schedule regular times to get to them. Set a time with your husband to go through household paperwork, put all the drycleaning items in a bag hanging on the back of the door, and set a regular time to drop it off. Do daily walk-throughs of the main rooms of your house and corral all the toys and other objects that belong elsewhere. Make that appointment to go to the doctor to get your knee checked out, and to the dentist.

If any one thing doesn't require more than about a minute of your time, take care of it immediately and get it done. Even when you leave it in your email inbox to take care of later, or put it in a drawer to deal with at another time, it's still sapping energy from you – your subconscious knows it's there. But if you have a regular time, your brain will stop mulling it over and over, and you'll have more energy for other things.

T – Taking things personally. Let's face it, we're women and we can be emotional. Even me, who rates as a "T" on the Myers-Briggs personality inventory – that means I'm a thinker rather than a feeler – I can still get my feelings hurt easily. The kids don't tell me they liked dinner, my husband forgets to hug me first thing when he comes home, the neighbor takes three days to return my call... all these can send me into a funk if I start dwelling on them! But I made a conscious decision to stop LOOKING for ways people were slighting me and insulting me. You know you'll find them if you look for them!

If you take every little thing to heart, you can easily become derailed, sidetracked, and overwhelmed. Yes, I still get little prickles when something happens. But I usually can either brush it off, or check in with a friend to confirm or challenge my perception of what occurred. Then if it's something that may need to be addressed, I do it sooner rather than later (see above – L – letting things pile up!).

Taking things personally is, to put it bluntly, a waste of time.

I – Ignoring warning signs. We recently moved to a new town, and we moved to a new house. It was a converted barn, over 100 years old. It was charming and rustic and we loved it – for about two months. Then the mice came. First, just a mouse or two here and there, then a veritable onslaught of mice, ending with us having caught over 50 mice in the period of two months.

There were other issues, too – no insulation, no air conditioning, no double-paned windows. We also discovered that we were in the flight path for the local air force base, which meant there were no regulations on how early – or late—planes could fly over. So we were awakened at 4 every morning by a fighter jet coming in for a landing. And then when it started to rain, we discovered the leaks. Of course, the landlord hadn't disclosed any of this – and by the time we decided that we'd had enough, it was winter. That meant we found ourselves moving the contents of our home across town the week before Christmas.

It wasn't our fault that the landlord failed to disclose some critical elements of the house. But it was our fault that we chose to ignore the warning signs until it was a desperate situation. We should have acted much more quickly and dealt with it earlier. We often don't want to admit there's a problem, or that we've made a poor decision. But ignoring warning signs doesn't make them go away.

I recently read an essay by the mother of one of the boys involved in the Columbine school shooting. She says she didn't pick up on many of the signs that her son was in trouble – his moodiness, his secretiveness. We might ignore warning signs with our kids, our spouses, our bodies. We can get so busy we think we have time, or we think we'll deal with it later. But we do so at our peril.

T- Talking instead of acting. Oh my goodness, this is my pet peeve! People often ask me how I get so much done. I usually give them some silly answer like, "Oh, I don't take

a shower," or "my house is a mess." But that's not true – I take pride in personal hygiene! My real secret is that I take action. I don't just think about things – I do them. It could be an idea for a new business, or thinking I should write a thank you note. I don't just mull it over – I go do something.

I try not to waste time thinking over and over, "I really need to call so and so about a playdate," or, "I've got to file that paperwork for Callie to start kindergarten." We can spend way more time worrying about or thinking about or planning to do something than it would actually take to just DO it! So when I think of something, I make it a habit to do it. And if I can't do it right then, I write it down in my notebook so the idea is there for later. We all have the same 24 hours, and none of us is NOT busy. The only difference between us all is that some of us take action and some of us just think about it.

A – Aiming for perfection. You've read the tagline on my site, "Life doesn't have to be perfect to be good." We can get so hung up on making everything "just so" that we don't have time to enjoy it, or we stress ourselves (and our families) out! Or we don't get ANYTHING done because we can't do it all perfectly so we just give up.

Redefine "perfect." Replace it with "good." Aim to create a good family, a good home, a good life. Then appreciate what you have!

This is the one I battle with over and over again. I have very high standards, for myself and for others. But I remind myself of the 80/20 rule... if you're not familiar with it, it basically says that 80 percent of the value from any activity comes from 20 percent of the effort. To get that last 20 percent of value, you have to invest tons of effort. Economists call this the law of diminishing returns. Think about cleaning the house. You can do a quick sweep through, getting most of the clutter and dirt and junk out of the way, wiping off the counter tops and throwing junk out. But to really get it to the spic-and-span, eat-off-the-floor stage, you'd need to invest hours on your hands and knees, scrubbing the corners and dusting the Venetian blinds one at a time.

There are times when you want that level of cleanliness – or perfection. Like when your mother-in-law is coming for a visit! But most of the time, the quick-and-dirty level is good enough. Did you hear what I said? ENOUGH! We need to learn to live in the place of "good enough," learning that most of the time, "enough" is GOOD ENOUGH. Then we have energy to make the things that are most important to us really magical. Or we can just take a nap. That's okay, too!

S – Shoving too much in. Have you ever been bagging your groceries at the Stop-and-Shop, with those flimsy little plastic bags? You put in two cans of corn and a bag of egg noodles, and you give it a test lift and think, I can get some more in there! So you add a six-pack of juice boxes and put it in your cart. And then when you get home and are getting it out of the car, the whole thing rips open and your cans of corn roll down the driveway and the six-pack of juice boxes explodes and you accidentally step on the bag of egg noodles and then you start swearing and yelling at the kids? Or maybe that only happens to me!

The point is, you thought you could fit more in that bag than you could. It looked like there was some room, but the bag just couldn't hold it all. So you ended up with a mess on your hands.

This happens to multitasking moms all the time! We think we can fit in one more obligation, or one more errand, or one more committee. Then we find ourselves perpetually late, cranky, and overcommitted. Any one thing isn't that big a deal. It isn't that the six-pack of juice boxes was too heavy, it just didn't fit with everything else. It wasn't that stopping by the library to return the books that made us late for school pick-up – it was the combination of that with the traffic with the long lines at carpool.

My solution is that when I start telling myself I can fit one more thing in, I stop. I just don't do it. I don't make that trip to the library before carpool. I don't add the juiceboxes to the grocery bag. I don't say "yes" to being on the planning committee for teachers' appreciation day at the preschool. I may end up being to pickup five minutes early, but

that's much better than being five minutes late. Or having a mess in the driveway to clean up!

K – Killing yourself. The biggest mistake we make as multitasking moms is simply wringing ourselves dry. We give and give and give and do and do and do and plan and plan and plan, and before you know it, your grey roots have grown in, your rear end is permanently shaped to the bucket seat of your car, and you can't remember the last time you read a book that wasn't an assignment for one of your kids' classes.

This doesn't work. It's no fun! You have to take room for you, even if it's insisting that you listen to YOUR music station in the car, or that you get 15 minutes after dinner, uninterrupted, to sit and read your latest Real Simple magazine. I know, it's hard. There are always more things to do than you could even accomplish. But this is life, right now. It's around us. It's in this moment. It's not in our to-do list or in our planner. If you aren't enjoying life NOW, you have some adjustments to make.

! And that brings me to the number 10. The tenth biggest mistake multitasking moms make is **Forgetting to add the !** What I mean by "!" is the excitement, the fun, the personality – adding a bit of you to whatever you do.

I often quote the title of a book by Cheri Huber. It's called, "How You Do Anything Is How You Do Everything." While the book itself wasn't all that life-shattering, I do think of the title all the time. It goes back to my last point – this is life, now. If I want a happy life, I need to be happy, now. If I want to be a person known for positive energy, I need to be positive in what I'm doing, right now. If I want to build a life of connection, I need to be connecting, right now. No, life is not always fun. No, life sometimes sucks. Kids get sick, jobs go away, friends go away. But we need to make up our minds what we want to stand for. Compassion? Fun? Giving? Whatever it is, there are a million opportunities to build it in your everyday life. That's your "!" Add it wherever you are. Bloom where you're planted. This is the life you signed up for! Now go enjoy it.

