

Wyoming Tribune Eagle, May 5, 2016: “Pause: B fully in the moment.” Casper Star Tribune, May 7: “Allow yourself to be fully present.”

On a visit to a business establishment where I’d gone with plans for a number of purchases for a home then under construction, the owner endeavored to help select what would address my needs. Yet her phone kept ringing, and she answered every time. Always she apologized afterwards, saying her assistant was out.

Annoyingly, though the proprietor said each time, “I’m very busy right now,” each telephone conversation went on at length. Obviously, her caveat left no impression on the callers.

For heaven’s sake, why don’t you inform them, “I have a customer with me right now,” I wanted to tell her. I didn’t, of course. It was my first visit, and the business had been recommended to me.

While I stewed I wondered why she didn’t let the phone go to answer. I now know why: My voice mails and emails to her have remained unanswered. If failing to respond to messages had become a pattern—everyone is “too busy”—she may have attempted to circumvent that pattern. She must have thought she could do two things at once, serving a customer and fielding telephone inquiries. She may even pride herself at her multitasking.

Not surprisingly, the company rep who recommended the business is so busy, he failed to provide crucial details in his transactions with me, yet he remains unaware of the short-cuts he takes. Does he indulge in multi-tasking? I suspect he does.

A writer gave me several of his (unpublished) stories to read. He tells me he is very busy. This astonished me, for earlier he conveyed that he is seventy-five, unmarried, and has no dependents.

“Your stories suggest a writer who is too busy to care about his readers,” I said after perusing them. “They’re replete with adjectives: ‘The lonely old woman.’ Adjectives fail to generate interest. You need to explain why the woman is lonely. Provide details about her age. How old is ‘old’? Sixty-five? Ninety-five? If you wish to work on your writing, begin by throwing out the adjectives.”

He wasn’t interested in improving his style, he said. In fact, he writes only “when inspiration strikes me.” That was that.

“I am busy” is a short-cut, and it’s just as self-defeating as a writer’s adjectives. Providing details—“I have a customer with me”—takes time, yet it accomplishes several things: it makes the customer feel validated, it alerts the caller (and the

speaker) to the need to be brief, and it helps the proprietor to focus on the present.

Maybe retirees dabbling in writing can be too distracted to care. Businesses can't afford that. Such, anyway, is the message in Tony Crabbe's "Busy: How to Thrive in a World of Too Much." A how-to book for business owners, managers, and entrepreneurs of all stripes, the book provides insight into why we fail when we are "too busy" and how to rectify these failings before they turn into disasters.

You can't be all things to all people, is one lesson. He cites Steve Jobs and his successors at Apple as turning down "many good ideas." Yes, these ideas may be snapped up by competitors, but Apple is determined to limit its "busyness."

Multi-tasking comes under fire repeatedly for its dismal performance. The author cites several studies illustrating that multi-tasking begets "dual-task interference," which will reduce the performance of "a Harvard MBA student to that of an eight-year-old." The financial repercussions are mind-boggling, and the only way to get around it is to "focus on one thing at a time."

The most common form of multi-tasking is switching rapidly from task to task. Each time we move between tasks, "the brain takes a little time to reorient itself to the rules of the new task at hand." The cost of individual switching may seem small, but the cumulative effect is significant. One study found that "switching backward and forward between tasks increases the overall time needed to complete the tasks by forty percent."

Some distractions are unavoidable. Many, however, are self-generated. Another study found "44 percent of all interruptions were self-inflicted." We delude ourselves that "continuous partial attention" will help us cover all the bases, yet the author argues that "attention management is far, far more important than time management . . . our impact starts, our breakthroughs occur, and our relationships are built when we get the best of our attentional systems."

To be fully present in the moment is rewarding. It allows us to experience joy and to cherish connectedness. The author reminds us that "We cannot hope to thrive and achieve all we dream of unless we manage our attention better." Thus, when we train ourselves to focus on a specific activity, we avoid "hopscotching busyness."

This book teaches readers to "Move Beyond Busy." Whether writer or homeowner, the lessons are worth our learning.