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**Sandra Wiley** • Jan. 31, 2014

The privilege of teaching leadership skills to firm leaders allows me the opportunity to identify various issues that are frustrating and sometimes difficult to negotiate. One of the issues that have risen to the top of the list recently is the age old issue of "Interruptions."

The ability to protect focus time, sneak off and find quiet, or to simply rest is challenging in our busy world today and becomes particularly difficult in this age of mobile devices. What's more, the noise level of society in general has been increasing steadily for decades.

Try to schedule just 15 minutes on a regular basis to catch up on industry publications in your office and you will be inundated by email messages, staff stopping by to ask you a question and the phone ringing.

While each of us craves the ability to work uninterrupted on occasion, especially on highly critical, challenging, or first-time types of tasks, we forget, that we interrupt others with the same abandon that they interrupt us.

Worse, even when we have the ability to control our exposure to the next voicemail, email, or text message, craving to know who has gotten in touch with us lately, we succumb, and click and tap away to see who our latest correspondent may be.

## **The Rising Tide**

The research regarding interruptions in the workplace today paints a grim picture. Unmistakably, interruptions are on the rise. Basex, a U.S. technology research firm, completed a survey that reveals that interruptions account for 28% of the typical

career professionals' workday. While this is not directly tied to our profession, I

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that resuming on the original task won't occur until the following day.

It's time to declare your independence. No one controls your schedule exactly like you do, not even an authoritarian partner. Most of the interruptions that plague you in the course of a day are in part, your own doing.

### **Allow or Do Not Allow**

At some level, you allow most interruptions to happen – either because you think you have to be available 24/7, or you fear missing the one phone call, or one email message that will make or break your quarter, or for that matter your career.

You fall into the trap of being too available, of checking messages too frequently, and of not relying on your natural ability to accomplish great things when you're able to focus intently on the task at hand.

Here then are some suggestions for taking charge of your personal environment, so that you can be your most productive self in those situations where concentration, intensity, and focus are essential:

- Surround yourself with everything you need to fully engage in the process, which also might involve assembling resources, people, and space, as well as ensuring that you have a quiet environment free of distractions.
- Give yourself the hours or days you need to read, study, and absorb what's occurring, and to make decisions about how you'll apply new ways of doing things and new technology to your career, business, or organization.|
- Go “cold turkey,” which is not recommended for most people! Suspend whatever else you're doing and engage in whatever it takes to incorporate a new way of doing things. This is enhanced by ensuring that you'll have no disturbances, bringing in outside experts, and assembling any other resources you need to succeed.

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