



# RISK MANAGEMENT CORNER

## An Impossible Skill

As you're reading this article, are you doing something else at the same time? Maybe you're eating, listening to the radio, or even planning your day. You might think you're multitasking, but—and this may come as a surprise—you're *not*. Scientists have learned that our brains don't process more than one stream of information at a time.<sup>1</sup>

When you read, your brain absorbs the information it receives through the act of reading. You may be conscious of the radio in the background, but, to be fully aware of the song that's playing, your brain drifts to the music for a few seconds. When that happens, you no longer comprehend the words on the page. The time "away" is so fleeting that you may not realize you're not fully focused on the original task of reading, leading you to believe you're multitasking.

Knowing what you know now about your brain's inability to process simultaneous activities, do you still think you can multitask behind the wheel? Keep in mind that, during the time your mind wanders from focusing on driving to focusing on a distraction, your vehicle may have traveled hundreds of feet. And, depending on the duration of the distraction, the trip could involve events much more disastrous than just "unconscious" driving.

*Multitasking is a mythical activity in which people believe they can perform two or more tasks simultaneously.<sup>2</sup>*

Employers whose employees drive on behalf of the company have a responsibility of ensuring their employees are safe drivers. They need to understand the gravity of a distracted driving incident, and the potential risk to others, themselves, and their employer—and possibly their job.

Explain the **three kinds of distractions** to your employee drivers, then work together to devise ways to avoid them.

- **Visual** – anything that takes your **eyes** off the road, both inside and outside the car.
- **Manual** – anything that takes your **hands** off the wheel. Two hands are much better than one for making corrective maneuvers.
- **Cognitive** – anything that takes your **mind** off driving. This is known as inattentive blindness. It's often what happens when you drive somewhere and don't remember the drive itself.

As much as we'd all like to believe we can multitask, our brains simply are not wired to do so. Being distracted while reading is relatively harmless; being distracted while driving is not. When you're focused on driving, it could help you avoid the guy in the next lane who isn't.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/sites/carolkinseygoman/2011/04/26/the-myth-of-multitasking/>; contributed by Carol Kinsey Goman

<sup>2</sup> "The Myth of Multitasking" by Christine Rosen, *The New Atlantis*, 2008 [http://www.thenewatlantis.com/docLib/20080605\\_TNA20Rosen.pdf](http://www.thenewatlantis.com/docLib/20080605_TNA20Rosen.pdf)

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