

SELLING POINTS

Work like your dog

Have you ever had that experience at work of forgetting where you were going and exactly what you were going to do? Or have you paused in the middle of a sentence and completely lost your train of thought?

What's going on? University of Michigan psychology professor David Meyer, says that too much multitasking is the culprit. Research shows that trying to do several things at one time may result in reduced brainpower for each task. So, what are we to do?

- **Practice staying focused.** Focus on one thing at a time and try not to move on to other things until you have completed the task. When dogs are chewing a bone, they are chewing the bone. They don't try to chew the bone and chase squirrels at the same time.

- **Get plenty of rest.** When you are dog tired it's time to stop for a break. Dogs make rest a major priority in their lives.

- **Slow down.** Remember, in the long run you will be more efficient by sticking to a single task. Constant switching back and forth actually takes longer and decreases your efficiency. Not all multitasking is bad. It's perfectly fine to chew gum while you walk. Most tasks at work, however, require concentration. If we try to do more than one thing at once, our work will surely suffer.

The "Work Like Your Dog" Institute is a Richland College program directed by Richland professors Luke Barber and Dru Bookout. Presentations and work/playshops are available through Richland Corporate Services. For more information, call (972) 238-6208 or (972) 238-6040.

Lessons learned from chasing squirrels

by *Connie Brubaker*

Earlier this year, my husband Eric and I decided to foster one of the more than 10,000 dogs abandoned during Hurricane Katrina. That's how Sadie, a beautiful German shepherd, came into our home.



Connie's Comments

I hadn't had a lot of experience with the breed, but it didn't take long for me to observe the fearlessness and self-confidence I've since learned are

typical of German shepherds.

I also noticed Sadie's tendency to run along the fence line when let outside. I've learned that's also a characteristic of the breed. Unlike border collies, shepherds aren't so much herders as they are protectors — their role was to protect a flock of sheep or goats from potential predators.

Sure enough, Sadie enthusiastically chases away all squirrels, birds, raccoons, armadillos and skunks unfortunate enough to enter her line of sight. While we were kayaking on Town Lake a few weeks ago, Sadie spied a squirrel on shore. Without hesitation, she jumped into the water, swam to the bank, and ran the squirrel up a tree.

I see that same focus every evening when we take her for a walk. She's always watching, always guarding. During hikes, she'll run ahead of me, then make wide circles around me, return-



ing to my side every few minutes to make sure I'm still OK.

German shepherds are "working dogs." They make excellent police dogs, seeing eye dogs and drug-sniffing dogs. In Sadie's case, she sees her job as looking out for both us and our property. And like other working dogs, she's happiest when she's on the job.

This wise breed can teach us a great deal about the power of focus. Learning how to shut out distractions and focus on the task at hand improves not only the quality of our work, but also the quality of our recreation. Whether it's listening to a client during a sales call, developing a marketing strategy, taking a walk or savoring a delicious meal, being able to focus on the experience is a very beneficial, productive

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Focus more, multitask less for success in work and life

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attribute.

That's easier said than done. We are continually bombarded by interruptions: phone calls, emails, faxes, pages, commercials, co-workers and more. We're submerged by the sheer number of things on our to-do list. We suffer from multitask-itis.

What's the solution? Simplify. Focus on one task at a time, giving it your full and undivided attention. Don't worry about what's next — concentrate on the here and the now.

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Connie Brubaker is a certified Integrity Systems® business consultant and professional speaker who focuses on sales, customer service and leadership.

Focus allows no room for fear, self-doubt or anxiety. It doesn't ask "but what if?". Watching Sadie chase a squirrel, I appreciate her decisiveness, the way she throws herself completely into the pursuit.

Forcing focus can be tiring, though. Consciously trying to ignore distractions usually only makes us more aware of them. Better to take another lesson from our four-footed friends and learn to acknowledge distractions without letting them overwhelm us. A dog on the hunt still senses and acknowledges the scents of other animals, but doesn't let them deter him from his prey.

Of course, it helps to enjoy the work we're engaged in. Too often, our idea of focus is to simply grit our teeth, put our nose to the grindstone and force ourselves to finish the task. Sometimes

that's necessary, but I'm convinced we do it far more often than necessary.

Instead, we need to learn how to take delight in the job in front of us. We should be able smile, laugh, even play a little while we work. Far from ruining our focus, a little levity can actually help preserve it.

We also sometimes confuse obsession with focus, constantly preparing for work, working or thinking about work. We fret and stress about work, and we think we're focused on it — but we're not. We're obsessed with it. Instead of chasing our squirrels, we're too often chased *by* them.

Focus is about living in the moment. When you're at work, focus on work. When you're with your family, focus on them. Throw yourself into life, and you won't regret it.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"When you feel dog-tired at night, it may be because you growled all day long."

— Anonymous