

Dollars & Sense...



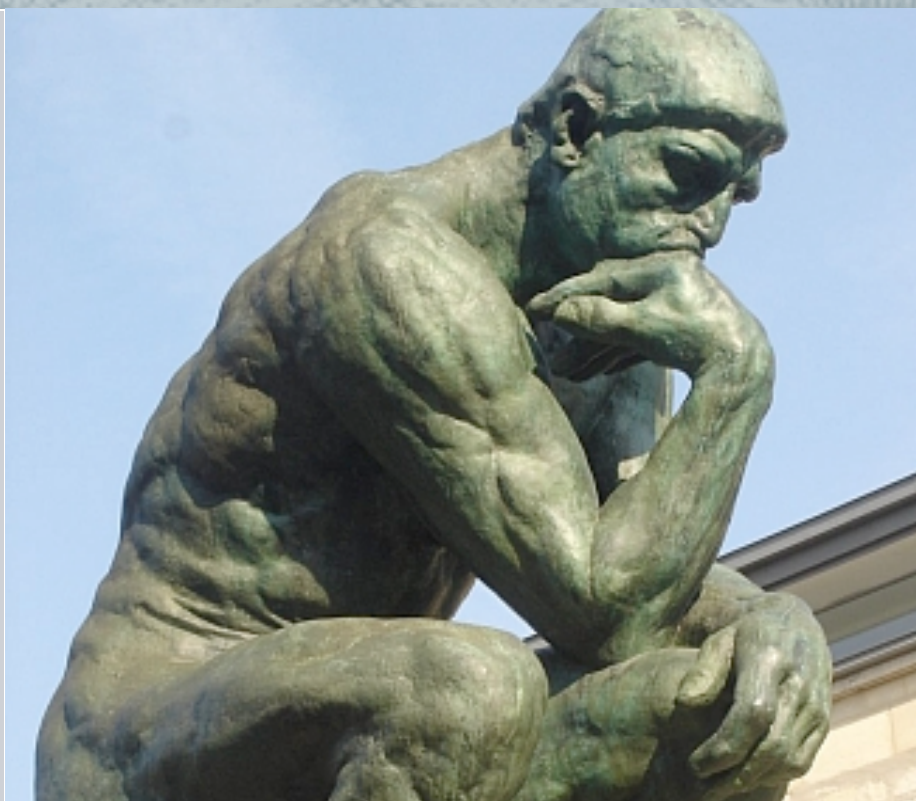
ABOUT THE AUTHOR...

LARRY JOHNSTON

Larry has spent over 40 years working on behalf of non-profit organizations. A well-known development and organization development consultant, coach, and mentor, he holds an M.A. degree in Organization Development and a Ph.D. in Human and Organizational Systems from the Fielding Graduate University.

Being passionate about “transformational development,” Larry’s doctoral research resulted in the creation of Donor Value Mapping® -- a research process to help organizations increase donor satisfaction, loyalty, and lifetime value.

Having consulted internationally with clients in Canada, Europe, and Latin America, he has a special interest in fundraising, strategic management, and organizational health and effectiveness. In addition to helping design and build sustainable, high-performance development programs, much of his work entails equipping leaders and managers to successfully manage organizational change. Larry and his wife Rebecca live in Colorado Springs, Colorado.



Behind in Your Think Time?

by Larry F. Johnston, Ph.D.

A *McKinsey Quarterly* paper, “Recovering from information overload,” provides additional evidence that the volume of information to which we are now exposed is not always a good thing.

Note that I said “exposed.” The volume of information *available* to us is, from my

vantage point, anyway, a *wonderful* thing.

In fact, often when I conveniently Google a key word for research purposes or search Wikipedia or other sources for information on various topics without leaving my desk, I’m reminded of how in my college days you had to physically go to the

library and manually search card catalogs!

By virtually any measure, the availability of information today is downright stunning.

In fact, one recent statistic indicates that Google now generates *every 24 hours* an amount of information equal to the total volume of information generated from the dawn of civilization until the year 2003! Pondering that fact and its consequences is sober indeed.

The McKinsey paper regarding information overload brought back to memory some of my earliest lessons in time management from Peter Drucker, Alec McKenzie, J.T. McKay and others.

One of the key lessons was that certain tasks require a minimum block of uninterrupted time, and that if you need several hours of concentrated time to achieve a high quality result, getting those hours in dissociated chunks of 15 to 30 minutes just isn't going to do the trick.

Enter "information overload" and the need for vigilance and diligence in *attention management*.

As one case in point, the paper notes: "A body of scientific evidence demonstrates fairly conclusively that multitasking makes human beings

less productive, less creative, and less able to make good decisions." Later in the paper, the authors note that current research indicates that "multitasking unequivocally damages productivity," despite doggedly persistent illusions to the contrary.

"Very simply, quality suffers when there's too little time to think."

Kindly note that my intent is not to bash multitasking. In fact, there are times when I wish I was better at it myself. As an INTJ (that's Myers-Briggs lingo to the uninitiated), I'm one of those who can go for extended periods of intense concentration – hours at a time – and sometimes "awaken" to realize my body is requesting nutrition. Having my brain fragmented and my attention splattered across multiple tasks within short periods of time just isn't my cup of tea.

On this point, it will come as no surprise that one of the most basic distinctions in

personality "types" is the difference between the "thinkers" and the "doers." Obviously, everyone both thinks *and* does, but with most people there's a clear preference toward one or the other end of the continuum. Some serious thinkers can get quite agitated when pushed out of their reflective caves for something as pedestrian as "action" (!), and some hyperkinetic doers can break out in a rash when forced into a situation that requires more than 10 minutes of sustained reflection.

Regardless of your personality type or temperament and corresponding cognitive styles, it's important to recognize that non-stop action -- especially under the relentless "tyranny of the urgent" -- will inescapably lead to performance degradations.

Very simply, *quality suffers when there's too little time to think*.

As W. Edwards Deming, the father of quality management, put it, "It is not enough to do your best. You must first know *what* to do, then do your best."

Unfortunately for some hyperactive types, that means stopping to think. Not in disjointed, microsecond bursts between emails or texting, but really *thinking*.

I'm not talking about the near "autopilot" routine processing of familiar data and established routines. I'm talking about the need to get perspective.

Like the story of the road being built through the Amazon jungle. A worker shimmies up a tree to look down on the construction crew and yells, "Quality work! Wrong direction!"

Well, to avoid getting caught in the trap of building a great road in the wrong direction, here's a thought to add to your time management toolkit: *Time budgeting*. It's not a novel thought, but it is an important one.

Now, take just a moment to look at your calendar. Do you see time intentionally set aside to just think? To really deeply ponder and reflect on the "big ticket" items? If not, consider starting today to actually begin *budgeting* think time.

The amount of time needed will obviously depend on the nature of your work, your temperament, your workload and other demands.

But if you're a leader, an executive, a manager or other knowledge worker, unless you have several hours of uninterrupted think time each week, good luck. You could

easily find yourself losing your "razor's edge" if it hasn't already been dulled by too much action and not enough thought.

I trust you never want to be like the guy on the freeway who angrily snapped at his wife: "So *what* if we're lost, at least we're making good time!"

On a deeper note, Abraham Lincoln once uttered one of my favorite quotes:

"If I had six hours to chop down a tree I'd spend four hours sharpening the ax."

That's a statement that obviously didn't come from someone behind in his think time.

McConkey • Johnston has had the privilege of helping leading ministries to become bigger and better for nearly four decades. How might we help you?