

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:00:00] The specifics can be debated, but, overall, it's irrefutable: The human brain is not designed to multitask, and with rare exceptions, gaining efficiency through multitasking is an illusion.

Peter Margaritis: [00:00:21] Welcome to Change Your Mindset Podcast, formerly known as Improv is No Joke, where it's all about believing that strong communication skills are the best way in delivering your technical accounting knowledge and growing your business. An effective way of building strong communication skills is by embracing the principles of applied improvisation.

Peter Margaritis: [00:00:42] Your host is Peter Margaritis, CPA, a.k.a. The Accidental Accountant. And he will interview financial professionals and business leaders to find their secret in building stronger relationships with their clients, customers, associates, and peers, all the while growing their businesses. So, let's start the show.

Peter Margaritis: [00:01:08] Happy Holidays. And welcome to Episode 18, the last episode for 2018. And my guest is Karl Ahlrichs, who is now the founding member of the Three Timer Club on Change Your Mindset Podcast. Karl always comes with a wealth of valuable information to help the audience become better and more productive at what they do.

Peter Margaritis: [00:01:32] Today's topic of discussion is that we, as humans, are not wired to multitask. And Karl gives us some great advice on how to be more productive while not multitasking because multitasking is really a myth. And Karl ties this all together by talking about how our brains are wired and why we can't multitask.

Peter Margaritis: [00:01:59] You see, I thought this would be a perfect episode to end the year on as the accounting community is moving into the busy time of the year starting in January, and there are a ton of nuggets he leaves behind that you can begin to implement ASAP, so you can become more productive during this time of year.

Peter Margaritis: [00:02:19] Before we get to the interview, I wanted to share that my book, Taking the Numb out of Numbers, was ranked number 12 of the best books in

2018 for speakers, as ranked by speakershub.com, which means you don't have to be a professional speaker to get value of this book. As long as you present information to non-financial professionals, there is a benefit in reading my book.

Peter Margaritis: [00:02:49] Here's the review they gave the book. Peter does an outstanding job demonstrating how to present numbers to a non-number audience. It is useful information that can be used in any presentation. It can help make a presenter a rock star. I highly recommend this book for anyone who presents financial data and wants to make it interesting and relative to their audience, whoever they may be. I have already used many of the suggestions in his book.

Peter Margaritis: [00:03:18] Thank you very much for the ranking. And thank you very much for applying some of my concepts to become a better presenter. Taking the Numb Out of Numbers will help you transform your ability to communicate technical knowledge in greater contexts through analogies, metaphors, and storytelling. Putting it another way, translate complex financial information into plain English, so your audience will gain a deeper understanding.

Peter Margaritis: [00:03:46] The book is available at Amazon.com, in paperback, and on Kindle. So, go out and buy it today. If you'd like to purchase 10 or more copies, please contact me at peter@petermargaritis.com for bulk discounts. So, without further ado, let's get to their view with Karl Ahlrichs.

Peter Margaritis: [00:04:08] Hey, welcome back, everybody. Today, we're having a first on the podcast. Today, is a first.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:04:14] No, it's not. It's a third.

Peter Margaritis: [00:04:17] It's the first time I had one person on for three times. And if you recognize the voice in the background, that is the Karl Ahlrichs, extraordinaire. And we were talking the other day on the phone. Actually, I think it was yesterday, we had this conversation. And you said, you had just delivered a presentation titled-

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:04:37] Multitasking: Myth or Reality.

Peter Margaritis: [00:04:40] And as we were talking, you said, "This would make a really good podcast." I went, "Exactly," especially this would be the last podcast for 2018. As we move into 2019, maybe after listening to the wisdom that you professed on everybody that they will take this on as a resolution for 2019 and eliminate multitasking.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:05:07] Now, let's spin it more positively that you'll get better quality work done more efficiently, as opposed to negatives because I'm a positive guy.

Peter Margaritis: [00:05:21] And I try to be positive.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:05:25] Well, and the interesting thing is everybody has thought that everybody will raise their hand and say they're good at multitasking.

Peter Margaritis: [00:05:33] Exactly.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:05:34] And it's a myth. And it's, medically, a myth. What made this interesting and the reason I wanted to share it was I uncovered some of the medical reasons. The brain wiring, brain chemistry reasons that it fails, as opposed to just I don't think it works.

Peter Margaritis: [00:05:53] Right. And when I was researching and writing the book, Numb for Numbers, I read this book Brain Rules by John Medina. And this guy is a neuroscience researcher who wrote this book about the brain and put it in a language that we all could understand. And one of the things he talks about is what you're going to talk about now is our brain can't multitask.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:06:13] It technically can't multitask. And the interesting thing is we can define it a couple of different ways, the ability to perform multiple tasks at one time, or switching back and forth from one thing to another, or a number of tasks in rapid succession, which is different actually. But let's let's go to the top of multiple tasks at

one time. If you've eaten at a quick service restaurant like Kentucky Fried Chicken, they will hand you a multitasking eating implement that is with a spoon and a fork.

Peter Margaritis: [00:06:56] The spork.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:06:59] The spork. It fails at both tasks. It's basically a spoon that can hurt you. And it's not good at stamping stuff, and it's not good at scooping stuff. So, just stop it.

Peter Margaritis: [00:07:14] I'm going to go on KFC, just so I can get a handful of sporks.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:07:19] So, there's a wonderful poster that has -- So, this is a visual part of today's podcast. Imagine a poster labeled "Multitasking" featuring a Giant spork, and the caption is, "The art of doing twice as much as you should, half as well as you could."

Peter Margaritis: [00:07:45] Is that visual actually out there?

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:07:47] Yeah, it's out there. I can look for it.

Peter Margaritis: [00:07:48] Okay. Because I think, if not, then we should create that visual.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:07:53] No, no. It's copyrighted.

Peter Margaritis: [00:07:54] Okay.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:07:54] Anyway, but with email, with texting, with phones, just the fact that I'm sitting here with a phone next to me makes me less efficient because my attention is drawn to it, and I'll switch over and check for messages, and then switch back to our conversation thinking there's no damage. And, actually, there is damage done. Oh my gosh. Hang on.

Peter Margaritis: [00:08:23] Seriously.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:08:23] I've told you not to call me here. That was Peter Margaritis. Wait a minute. I see what you did. You clever. Anyway, great example. Being bored in a meeting, posting on Facebook, drifting in a conversation, and checking email. I saw a wonderful note from my -- My son taught English, and he had a note that, "I know you're multitasking in my class. Nobody ever looks at their crotch and smiles."

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:08:58] But answering email, texting, writing a report, trying to complete a spreadsheet, it's kind of interesting. I'll bet your listeners are attempting to multitask by doing something while they listen to this podcast. And if I am so gripping, so engaging, so amazingly interesting that they run into a light post while they're jogging, then I would have proven my point.

Peter Margaritis: [00:09:29] Or they're listening while they're walking somewhere, and they run into a light post.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:09:33] There, that's better.

Peter Margaritis: [00:09:34] Or run over somebody. Yes, yes.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:09:36] So, if you're listening to this, it's about multitasking. While you're multitasking, you're busted. So, let's go to the summary. Let's go to the fun fact. The human brain cannot multitask, fact.

Peter Margaritis: [00:09:48] Correct.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:09:50] So-called multitaskers are just rapidly switching from one activity to another. In fact, there is psychological harm. There is an inability to concentrate and focus on the good stuff. And there is up to a 40% reduction in productivity from this as opposed to focusing on a task and completing it, then turning to

another task and completing it. And also, there's, I would call it decision fatigue sets in. You become less effective as you think.

Peter Margaritis: [00:10:27] Is the original multitask, because we talked about multitasking, with cell phones and all the other aspect, but was the original multitask sitting in the classroom, taking notes while the instructor speaks?

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:10:41] No, because you are learning better by processing what the professor speaks and logging it in written form. It actually increases learning. Multitasking is actually a computer term out of the 1960s, and a multimedia term from the 1990s. It comes from having a single processor and a computer that can, then, when a disk drive is reading something, and it takes time for the disk drive to do its function, the main CPU can cycle over, and maybe run some logarithmic tables out of its memory, and then check. And when the disk drive is done, it can park that, and go back to its original task.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:11:27] So, the main individual, singular CPU can be busy all the time, but it parses different tasks as it switches from one, to the other, to the other. And this frequent switching is the problem that we have. It's not a simple split of the difference. Let's say you have 100% of processing power.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:11:50] Right now, I am focused 100% on interacting with Peter Margaritis on his fancy computer box thingy where he's recording me. Okay, great. You can't split the difference. A 100% to Peter versus, let's say, I've got two tasks, balancing a spreadsheet and writing a document. If I were to split my brainpower between those two, it is not a 50/50 split. There is a loss of time to task switching as the brain flips from one to the other, and then has to get kind of settled on what the other is, and get processing on that. And the numbers I have seen, every flip takes about 20% of the brain's processing power, leaving 80% for the processing, not a hundred. So, instead of a 50/50 split, it's a 40/40 split with 20 wasted.

Peter Margaritis: [00:12:52] Interesting.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:12:52] So, therefore, if -- Now, you're saying, "Wait a minute. Karl. I know people, like, say, a musician who can play music and juggle. Well, if you've got muscle memory, and you've done it a whole bunch, and you're very familiar, and you're not critically learning new material or really having to focus on crafting a paragraph, that's fine. I mean, if you're basically reciting a nursery rhyme while you flip pancakes with a skillet, okay, you can get away with that because that's a lot of familiar territory.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:13:26] I'm not talking about that. If you're familiar plus familiar behavior, you're okay. If it's a focused thing, and you're focused on one thing, it's okay. But if you've got familiar in the background, and you're trying to focus, then it can quickly become not okay.

Peter Margaritis: [00:13:42] That's why we shouldn't text and drive.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:13:44] Exactly. Everybody can tell stories about what happens when you get distracted when you shouldn't be. So, let's agree there's two piles of things. There's the automatic things that are familiar, and simple, and trained. And there's controlled things where your brain has to control it, where it's unfamiliar, where it's complex, where it's untrained, where it's high level.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:14:05] I don't want the surgeon doing my knee replacement to have Pink Floyd on his headset and be dreaming of his Italian vacation. No, I want him focused on my knee. Hello, I want you here. How are we doing so far?

Peter Margaritis: [00:14:23] We're doing good. So, what is it about the brain? What is it that does not allow this parsing? We lose this information.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:14:33] Well, I'm going to talk to two things. One is outlook. Let me jump to that. First, let's agree that the brain is a computer, and it's a computer that, medically, is wired to do processing, but you have a single brain. You don't have a four-core brain. You have a single brain. It, basically, has your consciousness. Your awareness is a single. There's people who claim to have multiple personalities, but that's not today's topic.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:15:08] Let's agree the average American, the average human. I shouldn't say average American. Listen to outside the United States through the interwebs. The average human has a processing chip that has a single main core. And it has a lot of support brain parts that can shift things in and out of that core. I'm going to talk a little bit about some brain chemistry here.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:15:39] Okay.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:15:39] Have you ever heard of the fight or flight reaction of, "Boo. There's a bear." And this adrenaline and a stress hormone called cortisol is dumped into the bloodstream. It causes mental fog and scrambled thinking. It also enables you to pick up one corner of your car and lift it out of the ditch. A lot happens in that one thing.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:16:12] Well, it also creates a dopamine addiction feedback loop by rewarding the brain for losing focus. And then, you're constantly searching for external stimulation. This is what drives addiction to video games. This is what drives addiction to Facebook, "Oh, how many likes did I get? How many likes did I get? How many likes did I get?"

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:16:42] So, there is a chemical addiction happening with the switching function within the brain. So, the brain wants to switch, and I'm asking you not to. We also have in the prefrontal cortex, novelty bias. It wants something new. It gets hijacked by something new and shiny.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:17:07] And so, marketers and software programmers know to tweak that novelty-seeking, reward-seeking brain center by offering. You heard my phone ring. The little blue box at the corner of your outlook that, dong, it says new message, email ping, texting ping. It's a novelty-seeking, reward-seeking. And, now, I'm going to use some big words here. It causes a burst in the genus opioids. This is truly an addicting chemical in your brain.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:17:47] Think about it. The noise of a slot machine paying off, bom, bom, bom, bom, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. That is triggering a chemical reaction in the gambler's brain that they will do anything to get another one of those. Well, if that's running while you're trying to balance your spreadsheet or write your article, you're going to lose focus and get off task. The brain is wanting to get another hit, and wants you to get off target, and go find something fun, instead of this boring spreadsheet.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:18:32] So, within the brain, we've got the nucleus accumbens. It's a small structure in the limbic system. It regulates dopamine production. It's the region that lights up when gamblers win a bet. And email and Facebook reward that dumb novelty seeking portion of the brain driving the limb, and it creates this feeling of pleasure, and it says, "Oh my gosh. I want that." This is not the planning, scheduling, higher-level thought centers in the prefrontal cortex. This is lizard brain level stuff. That's the part that's causing us problems.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:19:08] How is it causing us problems? What's the outcome in all of this? If I talk about reducing efficiency and performance, there's medical data that shows that it basically lowers IQ by about 15 points. It's the equivalent of staying up all night. And it lowers brain density in areas of the cortex that are responsible for empathy, and cognitive, and emotional control.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:19:34] So, over time, if you do a bunch of multitasking that is paying off in these short term ding, ding, dings, it makes you less cognitive and have poorer emotional control, which actually may explain some people in my family, but it really affects the impact. It impacts learning. Learning information while multitasking fails.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:20:02] In the brain, there's basically two memory buckets, long term and short term. There's the striatum, the brain region that specializes storing new procedures and skills. And there's the hippocampus, the brain region that specialized for organizing and categorizing facts easier to retrieve. Basically, when you're multitasking, information is just sent to the short-term bucket, not the long-term bucket. So, it's just

like trying to cram for a test when you haven't slept, you're not getting a good take on the world when you're multitasking.

Peter Margaritis: [00:20:47] So, how do we break this addiction? As you're talking, I am listening, but I'm-

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:20:55] You're also distracted by your phone and thinking about the chips and dip up on the counter. I know.

Peter Margaritis: [00:20:59] No. I was thinking about my son, and the way he studies, and the way his friends study. They had to have some other distraction going on when they're studying.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:21:10] Well, that's a different topic. There is some logic to having some audio wallpaper going in the background when you're trying to focus. For instance, if you have traveled as much as you and I have, you know that occasionally we will get somebody in the next hotel room who's keeping us awake with erratic noises.

Peter Margaritis: [00:21:38] Yes.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:21:39] Do you know the bedside radio static trick, the white noise trick?

Peter Margaritis: [00:21:45] About playing white noise?

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:21:48] Yeah. If you turn a radio to a between-station static, that's pure white noise. Turn that white noise up, and the white noise masks the sounds in the background. Pretty quickly, your brain tunes out the white noise allowing you to sleep. So, that's not really today's topic, but the brain can adapt to constant background noises.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:22:19] If, indeed, they're focused on their studying, and they're focused on their material, and in the background is a YouTube video of stupid pet tricks, they're really not paying attention to the stupid pet tricks. They're going to be paying attention to one thing at once.

Peter Margaritis: [00:22:36] Because I've accused them of trying to multitask while he studies. but, apparently, I am wrong with that accusation to him.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:22:44] That's right because if he is -- Well, let me step back a second. In general, you're right, and he shouldn't have as many stimuli going at once. They had an experiment where they had somebody you're forced, you're asked to read a book, and sitting right next to them is a television with a program on, fairly loud.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:23:12] And after a certain period of time, let's say, 10 minutes, the subject -- So, it's an observed experiment. The subject is asked how many times did they switch their attention between the book and the television. And the subject, let's say, the median, they said six times. The research would show that, actually, they had switched 35 times, that you're not as conscious of it as you are.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:23:44] To me, from a learning standpoint, this is huge. As a facilitator of a training session, I'll be pretty firm with my audience that, no, they don't need to just silence their phones in their pocket, they need to put their phones in their pocket on silent upside down, face down on the table, or they're not going to feel them vibrate and get distracted. I want you disconnected for the next hour, unless you have someone in your family that's in surgery, or someone in your family who's fixing to give birth. The distracted people don't learn. And with all of our bait out there, the brain distracts very easily.

Peter Margaritis: [00:24:28] So, some have said they use Twitter to take notes, and post them to have a string of information that I can refer back to. Is that technically taking notes, or is that just another distraction masked as taking notes?

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:24:46] No, I think that, actually, it requires -- Short answer, I don't know. That's splitting hairs. Half of me says, "Yeah, they are taking notes, so that would embed some of the learning." The other half of me says, "Man, to post to Twitter, you have to be cognitively focused on your @ sign, user name, hashtag. That's clever, post a post," as opposed to the tactile having a Dixon number two pencil and a pad of paper where it's more visceral and less cluttered. I would say physically taking notes is far more effective than a Twitter feed.

Peter Margaritis: [00:25:28] Okay. I'm thinking about what we've been told. Let them have their phones, let them tweet. And that's what the younger generation-

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:25:39] Yeah, right.

Peter Margaritis: [00:25:40] And I have always kind of been, "Uh, not quite."

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:25:42] Yeah. I vote no on that. Well, and it's personal experience. I have gone to presentations where I tweeted. And at the end, I was disappointed that I really didn't get as much out of the presentation because I was living in two worlds: the world of the presenter and the world of Twitter.

Peter Margaritis: [00:26:04] Yeah. And there's other ways of being engaged in the classroom to help with the memory and help with the engagement of keeping their attention versus the electronic distraction.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:26:17] That's right. But, again, what did we learn? We've learned that the brain is wired to be addicted to the switching, and it's difficult to break that. I'm here to tell you it's medical. There's a brain chemistry reason that we are drawn to this. It's not that we want to watch a bunch of clever videos of cats doing cute things, it's that our brain wants us to switch, and it gets a reward for doing that.

Peter Margaritis: [00:26:47] And that's the dopamine. And there's the issue. And it's really like an alcoholic and obsessive gambler, it's that trigger, and I want that. I guess the only way to break it is go cold turkey.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:27:07] Yeah, just like any other addiction. And it can be harmful. I don't know about the Department of Traffic Safety, and I forget what it's called, MTA. The -- I forget.

Peter Margaritis: [00:27:19] NTSB?

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:27:19] Thank you.

Peter Margaritis: [00:27:21] You're welcome.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:27:22] Distracted drivers, four times more likely to have an accident while -- four times more likely to have an accident while talking on a cell phone. Oh, texting, 23 times more likely. It's real.

Peter Margaritis: [00:27:38] I'm laughing, but I'm not really laughing. As I was coming to the house, my wife and I go around 270, and we saw, seriously, almost three accidents. And it had to do with the phone, either talking on the phone or-

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:27:54] Good news. We do have autonomous driving on the horizon and that will help. It will save us from ourselves, in spite of ourselves.

Peter Margaritis: [00:28:04] Yeah. But we could do something in the end. Something has got to be done in the outcome. It's dangerous out there.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:28:10] It is. All right. Let's start moving towards the fixing of this. I want to offer a basic strategy, and then a specific thing you can do in your work space.

Peter Margaritis: [00:28:23] Okay.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:28:24] Clearly, it's a focus on the task at hand, identify and focus on the process that you want to have done, decide what needs your full attention, triage, prioritize, and then just pay attention, reduce distraction. I have learned that my office

could have no windows and no clue about the outside world. I live and work in a bunker. Excuse me. I work in a bunker when I need to focus, so that I truly am not distracted by birds, and trees, and fluffy clouds.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:29:02] Second, do less, delegate, hand off to colleagues, hand off to technology. Figure out the stuff that can be handed off, so that your precious brain power can be used for the good stuff, for the creative moments. If there's rote behaviors, if there's anything we can automate, as artificial intelligence arrives in our lives, we'll be able to have the sorting and balancing of a spreadsheet done automatically, and we can think great thoughts for the world instead. So, we can delegate and do less.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:29:40] Next, one thing at a time. One at a time is more efficient. Focus and prioritize first, then do one thing at a time. One bite at a time. Here's a great exercise. You happened to have a piece of paper and a pencil?

Peter Margaritis: [00:29:55] Somewhere around here.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:29:57] Find it. I want you to do something.

Peter Margaritis: [00:29:59] I didn't know this was going to be a quiz.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:30:03] I'm going to have write. And everybody in radio land, if you're not driving, if you're sitting there with a piece of paper and a pencil, in one line across, write the first nine letters of the alphabet A B C D E F G H I. Okay, that goes across. Right underneath that, let's write 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

Peter Margaritis: [00:30:33] All right.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:30:35] Do that? All right. I'm going to time you on this, Peter. You're going to tell me when you start and stop. I want you to write that again in the same way that you wrote it when I say go, I want you to start writing A B C D E F G H. when you get to the end of the line, go underneath it, and go 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

Peter Margaritis: [00:30:58] Okay.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:30:58] Do you understand the task?

Peter Margaritis: [00:30:59] I believe I do.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:31:01] All right, three, two, one, start.

Peter Margaritis: [00:31:05] Done.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:31:15] Okay. 10.5 seconds. Okay. Now, I want you to do this Again, but I want you to not write them sequentially. I want you to alternate between A, 1, B, 2, C, 3, and so on where you're all alternating between the lines. You are multitasking. You understand that task?

Peter Margaritis: [00:31:36] And I'm going in the same direction?

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:31:39] Correct.

Peter Margaritis: [00:31:39] Okay,

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:31:40] It's going to end up looking the same. You're just going to do it splitting your attention between the two. Ready? Tell me, are you ready?

Peter Margaritis: [00:31:48] Ready.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:31:49] Three, two, one, go.

Peter Margaritis: [00:31:51] Darn it. Okay.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:32:05] 15 seconds. You see, how did that feel?

Peter Margaritis: [00:32:11] It wasn't fun.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:32:15] And, probably, the quality of the work dropped. I heard a curse word.

Peter Margaritis: [00:32:20] Yeah, yeah. I screwed up.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:32:24] Yeah, yeah.

Peter Margaritis: [00:32:24] Yeah.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:32:26] Do you see my point?

Peter Margaritis: [00:32:27] I got your point.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:32:27] Okay. Other things you can do, control your environment. I got rid of my windows, just because it's me.

Peter Margaritis: [00:32:39] Now, when you say control your environment, something I've been doing lately to increase my level of focus is I'll read email for 10 minutes. When I start my day, I shut email down. I'll look at it again at noon, shut it down. Look at again later in the afternoon, shut it down. So, I remove that distraction. Is that what you're talking about?

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:32:57] You are a wise grasshopper.

Peter Margaritis: [00:33:01] Thank you.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:33:01] Also, by grouping things together, so that you have everything needed for the job means that you can start, finish, and complete a chunk without having to get up from your chair. You can assemble things. It becomes more automatic if everything you need -- You cook dinner, right?

Peter Margaritis: [00:33:24] Yes, sir.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:33:26] Before you start the stove and get the pan hot, right there on the counter, what do you have?

Peter Margaritis: [00:33:34] A glass of bourbon.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:33:37] Maybe I should ask my question.

Peter Margaritis: [00:33:40] Yeah, I have got a-

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:33:41] The answer I was hoping for was that you would have all the ingredients assembled and ready to go.

Peter Margaritis: [00:33:46] I do, and a glass bourbon.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:33:47] And a glass of bourbon. Unless you're cooking with the bourbon, in which case you have to glasses. Another thing that makes a big difference is aerobic exercise. Overall physical fitness appears to improve the outcome of all tasks, and it improves cognition.

Peter Margaritis: [00:34:08] You know why?

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:34:10] No.

Peter Margaritis: [00:34:11] Because it's doing something with those stress hormone, the cortisol.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:34:17] Interesting. Okay, that makes sense.

Peter Margaritis: [00:34:18] It's like you're flushing toxins out of your body. By exercise, it flushes those stress hormones out of your body versus without exercise, it continued to build up in your system.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:34:32] Yeah. But you're exercising your heart. I want you to exercise your brain. You will, by this, become a more balanced human being.

Peter Margaritis: [00:34:45] Yes.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:34:46] And that will make all the difference. That's kind of my point in all of this. I mean, the specifics can be debated but, overall, it's irrefutable. The human brain is not designed to multitask. And with rare exceptions, gaining efficiency through multitasking is an illusion.

Peter Margaritis: [00:35:05] Exactly, it is. And one of the chapters in Brain Rules talks about exercise, how to boost brain power as well.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:35:13] Yeah. And I saw a coffee cup that said, "Multitasking: the single best way to screw up both jobs." Let me give you a final tip on fixing it. I work somewhat in lean theory and tactile thinking. And in the work done on factory floors, and in hospitals, et cetera, imagine three columns on a sheet of paper. The first column is labeled to do, middle column is labeled doing, that's work in progress, and the third column is done.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:36:00] If you were to have a whiteboard near your work space, a pack of the three-by-three yellow stickies and a sharpie marker in the color of your choice, you could jot a word or two about every to do, and put them in the to-do column. You are only allowed to work on what's in the doing column that you prioritize. And the doing column should only have a couple three items in it. Too few items in the doing column

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:36:37] And you may not be purely efficient because there'll be times you hit a stopping point. Somebody has to bring you a report or something. You can, then, pivot and focus on a second topic. That's different than multitask. And then, once things are completed they move into the done pile and can be delivered. And then, by

doing that, you free up space for something else to be prioritized in the to-do column, come on over. This simple process, it's called a Kanban board.

Peter Margaritis: [00:37:09] Kanban board.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:37:09] Kanban, K-A-N-B-A-N. It's a Japanese manufacturing term. It's part of Lean Theory and it's focused on getting waste, as part of Lean, which is focused on getting waste out of a process, or life, or as far as you doing things. And they have a lot of different things that they do. What I have simply lifted, this one simple planning structure out of the middle of a very complex Lean Theory lecture.

Peter Margaritis: [00:37:40] That makes sense. I mean, it's a Japanese way, especially Just in Time inventory system.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:37:47] Or the Almost in Time inventory system.

Peter Margaritis: [00:37:49] Yeah, the almost in time inventory system. It's prioritization on -- what was it I recently heard? Is it urgency and important?

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:37:59] Yeah.

Peter Margaritis: [00:37:59] And the difference between the two. Something maybe urgent but maybe not as important as the important things that we need to get done.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:38:09] That's right.

Peter Margaritis: [00:38:10] It's funny that you talked about multitasking stuff because I'm going through a process right now of trying to refocus again, and employing some things that fell off the wagon, and bringing it back into place. And this shutting the email, and becoming more focused, and prioritizing, putting things in place. And Greg Conderacci, you know our good friend, Greg Condracci.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:38:32] I do.

Peter Margaritis: [00:38:33] He also prescribes about the best time to use your energy is -- Some people are more energized later in the day. Some are more energized earlier in the day. If you get your energy and most creativity in the morning shut, everything down, but use that time to be creative. Eliminate all distractions. And that's one of the strategies I use to get the book done. So, I write in the morning, first thing, get it out of the way, get it done, most creative, and then move on. Versus if I wait until the afternoon, not getting done. It gets pushed away.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:39:05] If anyone would like additional resources on the kanban, there's a website out there www.personalkanban.com. There's plenty there.

Peter Margaritis: [00:39:19] So, you know my audience. You speak to my audience a lot.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:39:22] I am your audience. You've only got two of us.

Peter Margaritis: [00:39:24] Well, my audience who's listening, our audience that we speak too, the finance and accounting professionals. And we all know, this is the last podcast of the year. We know that once the calendar flips, the worlds flip. And then, as we get closer into February, it becomes faster. More workers being pressed on us. The more opportunity to be distracted and attempt to multitask.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:39:53] Yeah.

Peter Margaritis: [00:39:54] You've given your tips, but what's your advice in making that achievement? Especially in March when we're in the throes of everything. Especially end of February, early part of March, whether you're in public or you're in industry, we're in the throes of it. And it's easier to go back to what we've always done before.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:40:21] That's a good point. This is a question of workflows. We get used to how things should work. We've got a little bit of time here to practice a better

way of working. And I just want to challenge people to reflect on what I said, figure out what parts of it -- First off, I wanted to scare everybody that it really is medically true. And then, give a couple tools that people might customize into their worlds, so that they get a little more control, and they are doing what they choose in the proper orders.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:41:05] Just as you have turned off the email ding, and focus on emails in windows, that kind of thinking, I don't want to lecture on how they should do it. Today's purpose was just to wave the flag that they ought to consider looking at their workflows and working at their priorities, so that they have a more balanced, fundamentally sound life.

Peter Margaritis: [00:41:33] And being the HR professional that you are.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:41:38] Yes, I am.

Peter Margaritis: [00:41:39] That is advice that should be written down. I guess, my point is they should make some visual reminder to them.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:41:48] Yeah, that's what I like. Well, that's why I personally like the Kanban board. But you got a to-do list that works. Just a reminder, use it. Prioritize things and only work on a couple things at once. Don't overwhelm yourself. Don't fool yourself that you can chip away 10 things at once on the to-do list.

Peter Margaritis: [00:42:08] Well, Karl, you always bring great advice, great knowledge to the podcast. I think this is perfect timing with the new year coming up.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:42:16] Yeah.

Peter Margaritis: [00:42:16] And I challenge everybody who's listening, all three of you, to the audience to consciously write something down in your desk, whatever, to remind yourself to stay focused. And I love the Kanban thing. And if you have it in your planner, use the moleskin or whatever. We'll put that visual reminder out there, so you continue to do it, and you'll find yourself becoming much more productive.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:42:47] You just focus better. You just focus better. I want to close with everybody does this. Here's the situation. You're driving, you've got the radio on, you're in an unfamiliar neighborhood, you're moving, it's dark, and your GPS just doesn't make sense. What do you turn off to get rid of the multitasking?

Peter Margaritis: [00:43:08] The radio.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:43:08] And then, pull over and throw it in park. And then, focus and figure it out.

Peter Margaritis: [00:43:17] Yeah, exactly.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:43:18] With that, may everybody have a pleasant productive 2019. I wish you all the best.

Peter Margaritis: [00:43:24] And we wish you all the best as well. Always great to spend time with you, buddy. I look forward to when our paths cross again. And thanks for taking the time to share this with the audience.

Karl Ahlrichs: [00:43:36] Thanks for having me. Good luck, everybody.

Peter Margaritis: [00:43:40] I can't thank Karl enough for taking time, for explaining to us why multitasking is a myth, and giving us some real strategies, so we can be more productive.

Peter Margaritis: [00:43:51] In Episode 19 which airs on January 7th, I interview three CEOs of state CPA associations. And they are Allen Lloyd from Montana, Boyd Search from Georgia, and Chris Jenkins from South Carolina. All three used to work at the Ohio Society of CPAs and are great friends. We discuss a lot about State CPA Associations and the issues that members are facing in the accounting profession. And we have a blast doing the interview.

Peter Margaritis: [00:44:20] So I'd like to, one, wish everybody a happy holiday season. Merry Christmas, Happy New Year. I look forward to listening to the podcast in 2019. And thank you for taking time to listen. And please share this episode with a friend.