



## WHEN TO HAVE THE CHAT OPEN AND WHEN TO CLOSE IT

Chat-based collaboration platforms like Teams and Slack are increasingly replacing internal emailing in many businesses. By the way, it is not just in Teams and Slack that more informal discussions are taking place these days - it seems as if every app and service with a sense of self-respect has chat, DM, and commenting capabilities.

A comment is seldom left unanswered and before you know it there are entire threads in Messenger, Planner, Trello, and lots of other places to take into consideration as well.



## TWO SIDES TO THE COIN

If you have these discussion streams open, you keep up with what is going on and what the "others" (colleagues, project participants, and the like) are up to, think, and want. However, if you try to keep up with everything when you really need to concentrate on your other tasks, you will become fragmented and it will take much longer to get these tasks done. It simply makes your work more difficult instead of easier.

## IT DEPENDS ON WHAT IT'S ABOUT

So, when should you keep the chat open and when should you stay away from it? Some guidance can come from Mark, Gonzalez, and Harris, who in their study "[No Task Left Behind? Examining the Nature of Fragmented Work](#)" found that interruptions or sensory cues related to the task we are currently working on are often perceived as helpful in what we are doing, while interruptions associated to **something completely different** than the task at hand are considered aggravating or unwanted distractions.

If the message received in the chat concerns the task you want to get done right now, you should be able to keep the chat open without being disturbed. If it is about something else, closing the chat for the moment will help you concentrate on the task at hand.

## WHAT IF THEY NEED TO GET HOLD OF YOU?

You might think that one reason to keep the chat open, even if the conversation there is about other things, is that you have made the chat your "emergency channel" which your colleagues use to get a



quick response from you. However, I would rather solve your availability by having selected notifications turned on for the chat. That way, you will be alerted when something actually "is up" without having to see everything else that happens there.

## DO THIS

If you recognize how the chat can both help and hurt, try the rule of thumb deduced from the Mark, Gonzalez, and Harris study today, which we could formulate like this:

- If the conversation concerns what you are working on, keep the chat open. If it concerns something else, keep the chat closed (and catch up and respond when it suits you better).

At the end of the day, think back on how it went and evaluate: was this a rule you would be comfortable following in the future? Or, do you need to adjust it a bit, so that it benefits your work even more? Maybe you should keep the chat open more than what the rule suggests because it contributes to a sense of togetherness when colleagues are far away and you miss the pleasant small talk?

## CONCENTRATED AS WELL AS UP TO DATE

If you keep the chat open when the conversation is about the task you are working on, you can concentrate on the right thing, keep up with what "the others" are saying, and actually get help with what you need to get done - judging by the study mentioned above. You get the best of both worlds if you ask me.

## HOW DO YOU DO IT?

What useful strategy do you have for when to have the chat open and when to keep it closed? Write to me at [david@stiernholm.com](mailto:david@stiernholm.com) and tell me. Understandably, this is a hot topic for many people, so I'm curious to hear your take on it.

Thank you for reading this edition of Done!, and welcome back next week.



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