

# Time management: Why we feel busier when close to reaching a goal

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Is there any worse time to be interrupted than right now? Regardless of what we're doing or the nature of the interruption, we often feel as if we have no time to spare at the moment. According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, consumers feel busier when they are close to finishing a task or reaching a goal.

"We often decline or delay opportunities because we are just so close to finishing what we are doing right now. Consumers often postpone a visit to a financial planner, skip going to the gym, or put off having a drink with a friend just because they are so close to completing what they are doing at the moment," write authors Ji Hoon Jhang (Oklahoma State University) and John G. Lynch Jr. (University of Colorado).

Across three studies, the authors showed that consumers tolerate [interruptions](#) less the closer they are to completing a task or achieving a goal.

In one study, consumers were interrupted and asked to take a one-minute survey while on their way to board a plane. When asked to fill out the survey while waiting for the train to the terminal, more consumers declined and those who did the survey reported that they had less spare time than those who were interrupted after arriving at the gate. Interestingly, those waiting for the train had more time to departure than those at the gate. However, being closer to their immediate goal (boarding the train) made them impatient and more likely to turn down the survey.

When [consumers](#) are close to reaching a goal (even one that can easily be paused or delayed), they willingly incur costs (both time and money) to avoid interruptions that could actually benefit them. Consumers should understand that they may be feeling really busy just because they are close to finishing a task and not because they are truly pressed for time.

"It may not be harder today to fit in a visit to a financial planner or a trip to the gym than it will be a month from now. But we delay these valuable interruptions because we feel so busy with often trivial tasks that are almost finished. The irony, of course, is that tomorrow, next week, and next month will present just as many tasks and just as many excuses for putting off 'interruptions' that could improve our well-being," the authors conclude.

**More information:** Ji Hoon Jhang and John G. Lynch Jr. "Pardon the Interruption: Goal Proximity, Perceived Spare Time, and Impatience." *Journal of Consumer Research*: February 2015.

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