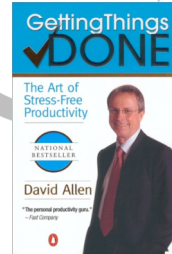## Stress-Free Productivity – Elusive Goal or Real Possibility?

Elaine Fairey, Simon Fraser University Library
Gordon Coleman, BC Electronic Library Network
BC Library Conference, Burnaby, BC
April 17, 2009

What we're going to do today

GettingThings DONE
The Art of Stress-Free Productivity
NATIONAL BESTSELLER
David Allen
"The personal productivity guru."
– Fast Company

- GTD philosophy
- The basic process
- Practical exercise
- Personal reflections
- If you're interested, buy the book

Basics of the Philosophy

- You can't manage time, you can't manage information overload, you can't manage priorities
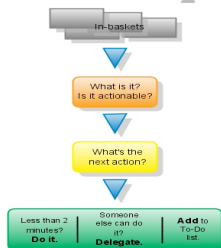- You *can* manage your actions

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The Five Keys

- Capture your commitments
- Clarify exactly what you need to do
- Organize your lists, information, and materials
- Keep reminders in a system you review regularly
- Engage, take action

The basic process: Emptying your in-baskets

In-baskets

What is it? Is it actionable?

What's the next action?

Less than 2 minutes? **Do it.** | Someone else can do it? **Delegate.** | **Add** to To-Do list

The scenario: You arrive at work to find …

Process each item

- Look at it. What is it? Is it actionable?
- If it's not actionable:
  - Trash it
  - File it for reference
  - Store in a Maybe/Someday file

What is the Next Action?

- If actionable, clarify exactly what you need to do
- What is the *next physical action* which will move this towards completion?

Action!

- If takes less than two minutes, DO IT.
- Should someone else do it? DELEGATE.
- Otherwise, ADD to your "next action" list or calendar.
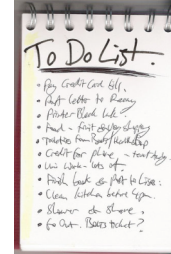
Capturing: What Has Your Attention?

"Mind Sweep"

- Fold a lined page in half to make 2 columns
- Write one item per line
- Write fast, no order, no analysis
- Go for quantity!

Triggers?

- Professional and personal activities
- Big and small stuff
- Concrete and abstract ideas/actions
- Things you have to do
- Things you want to do

Elaine's Sample List

- Repaint deck
- Update will
- Send PARs and JDs to HR
- Update SLC consultation rooms
- Claim medical receipts
- Plan summer vacation
- Organize orientation activities
- Read student retention report

Clarifying: "Stuff" → Action

Divide another piece of paper into three categories and make these headings:

Stuff	Next Action(s)	Outcome

"Stuff" → Action

- Write a few items from your list under Stuff
- Beside each item write the next action to:
  - Complete the task or
  - Accomplish the goal or
  - Move the project forward

First Cut

Stuff	Next Actions	Outcome
Repaint deck	Buy paint	
Update will	Call lawyer	
Send PARs and JDs to HR	Complete PAR details	
Claim medical receipts	Gather receipts and complete form	
Update consultation rooms	Get input from staff	

Really? Questions to Ponder

- Are these really the *most* specific next actions?
- Do you really need to do something else first?
- E.g. any unresolved issues or questions to deal with? Any information to gather?

More Specific

Stuff	Next Actions
Repaint deck	Find paint chip and colour code
Update will	Decide details with spouse
Send PARs and JDs to HR	Talk to HR advisor re dates and codes
Claim medical receipts	Set aside time on Saturday morning
Update consultation rooms	Send email query to staff with background info and response date

Getting Beyond Details

- Is GTD just a bunch of lists?

- How do "next actions" tie into big picture stuff like values, projects or goals?

tochis, "Achieving Goals", 2008.
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/tochis/2512323454/>
Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 2.0 Generic.

"Nags" → Projects/Goals

Stuff	Next Action(s)	Outcome
Repaint deck	Find colour chip	Enjoyable back yard
Update will	Talk to spouse	Organized personal affairs
Send PARs and JDs to HR	Phone HR advisor	Staff in place
Claim medical receipts	Schedule time	Money back!
Update consultation rooms	Email staff for input	Effective / attractive service space

Personal Reflections

- Effective systems are personal & personalized

- Effective systems can't be mandated or imposed

Most useful elements of the system?

Aka "life hacks"
- Trusted containers
  - Someday/maybe list
  - Agendas for people/meetings
  - Waiting for..
- Next action discipline
- Email folder organization (e.g. @action)
- Technology agnostic

Most challenging elements?

- Getting started
- Regular review
- Getting in-basket to empty
  - Most "2 minute" tasks take 5 minutes
- Thinking is hard
- Deciding is hard
- Commitment is hard

GTD gaps?

- Privileges process/actions over people/relationships?
- Emphasizes happiness through work?
- Trees not forest? Seduction of detail/system ("productivity pr0n")
- Prioritizing?
- Getting from "next action" to "horizon"?

Final Thoughts

- No magic bullet
- Effective processing takes time and commitment
- Not keen to commit to the "system"? Even small GTD ideas are very useful
- Ready to commit? dabble?

Getting Started with GTD

- Read the book
- Check out the "getting started" section of the Resource list (handout)
- Connect with a friend or two and commit to discussing experience in 2-3 months
- Get your hands dirty

Resources: Getting Started

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43 Folders. http://www.43folders.com/