Getting things done
by David Allen

How to deal with
an overwhelming number of things
to do
without feelings of stress and anxiety
“Getting things done”

An introduction to GTD ‘Getting Things Done’

• **Background**
  - Bestselling author, “Getting Things Done”
  - GTD system

Brent Krueger
What is GTD ‘Getting things done’?
Why are we stressed?
To become silent water
Some thoughts about the brain and the consequences of ‘loose ends’
Mastering the workflow
Workflow diagram
Manage your own projects (vertical dimension)
Various ways of implementation
References
David Allen

“One of the most influential thinkers on productivity” – Fast Company Magazine

Your ability to generate power is directly proportional to your ability to concentrate.

You ability to concentrate is directly proportional to your ability to eliminate distractions

Distraction is created by mismanaged commitments.
Your Mind is for Having Ideas, Not for Holding Them

David Allen

- **Key concept**
  - Think small. Get the details under control

- **Core principles**
  - Collect, Process, Organize, Review, Do
What is GTD ‘Getting things done’?

- It’s an Action Management Method – we do not Manage Projects or Tasks – we manage actions!
- A Time Management System
- Complements our inefficient “Mental Reminder System” – clean up all loose end
- All about horizontal and vertical organization
Do you experience stress from...

- unanswered calls,
- tasks not delegated,
- unprocessed issues from meetings and conversations,
- personal responsibilities undone,
- e-mails not dealt with,
- .......

Why are we stressed?

- Perception of having ‘Too much to handle and not the time to get it all done’
  - Take on too many commitments
  - Having too many ideas
  - Too much involvement
  - Changing jobs with ever changing Know-how to grasp
- Too many distractions – no appropriate focus possible
- Ineffective personal organizational systems creating huge subconscious resistance – loose ends
It’s All in Your Mind

Key elements
- Control
- Perspective

Incompletes and Open Loops pull at your attention

Identify those things that “ring your bell”
To become silent like water

*First:* Clear your mind by emptying it! Anything you consider unfinished in any way must be captured in a trusted system outside your mind where you come back to regularly and sort through.
To become silent like water

*Second*: Clarify exactly what your commitment is and decide what you have to do, if anything, to make progress toward fulfilling it.
To become silent like water

Third: Once you’ve decided on all the actions you need to take, you must keep reminders of them organized in a system you review regularly make progress toward fulfilling it.

Google Calendar/ Tasks
Some thoughts about the brain and the consequences of ‘loose ends’?

- **Why is our mind not so smart?**
  - Do you have a flashlight somewhere with dead batteries in it? When does your mind tend to remind you that you need new batteries? When you notice the dead ones! That’s not very smart. If your mind had any innate intelligence, it would remind you about those dead batteries only when you passed live ones in a store!

- **Why do you think of stuff you can’t make progress on?**
  - Between the time you woke up today and now, did you think of anything you needed to do that you still haven’t done?
  - It’s a waste of time and energy to keep thinking about something that you make no progress on.

- **Stuff are open loops – Anything you have allowed into your psychological or physical world that doesn’t belong where it is and for which no outcome and next action has been defined!**

- **Stuff has to be transformed in actionable items in a wider system.**
Managing Action

- The key to manage your “stuff” is managing your actions.

- Horizontal and Vertical Action Management
  - Horizontal control maintains coherence across all the activities in which you are involved.
  - Vertical control, in contrast, manages thinking up and down the track of individual topics and projects.

- The major change: Getting it all out of your head!
  - The short-term-memory part of your mind – the part that tends to hold all of the incomplete, undecided, and unorganized “stuff” – is overloaded with Stuff. Stuff works like myriads of little monitors popping up arbitrarily and distracting your focus. Furthermore, if you have loaded much stuff there will always be conflict as you only can fulfill one task at a time.

- This produces ongoing stress – stress that is ubiquitous like gravity.
Managing Commitments

- If it’s on your mind, your mind is not clear
- What is your commitment and what must be done?
  - voicemail, email, mailboxes, colleagues, notes from meetings
- Organize reminders of your action plan and free your brain from keeping track of everything
Collect Incompletes – Why?

- Get *stuff* out of your mind into a **system** you trust
  - The brain is wonderful at solving problems
  - *It can only do this for one problem at a time*
- Like a single-core CPU with multiple processes, your brain will revisit unfinished tasks in time-slices
- Even at times when you can’t do anything about it.
  - …3am
What’s the answer?

2 key principles:

1) capturing **ALL** the things that need to get done – now, later, someday, big, little, in between – into a logical and trusted system outside of your head and off your mind.

2) disciplining yourself to make front-end decisions about all of the “inputs’ you let into your life so that you will always have a plan for **next actions** that you can implement or renegotiate at any moment.
The key to managing all your “stuff” is to manage your **actions** – and each action often requires only a minute or two, in the appropriate context, to move a project forward.

You can’t do a project- only an action related to it.
We (1) **collect** things that command our attention; (2) **process** what they **mean** and what to do about them; and (3) **organize** the results, which we (4) **review** as options for what we choose to (5) **do**.

With (5) it is important to choose according to the following criteria:

- **What can I do?**
- **What can I do in the time I have?**
- **What do I have the energy to do?**
“stuff”

“In-basket”

Is it actionable?

YES

NO

What’s the next action?

Will it take less than 2 minutes?

YES

NO

Do it

Delegate it

Defer it

Waiting

Calendar

Next actions

Projects (planning)

Project plans (review for actions)

Trash

Someday/Maybe (tickler)

Reference (file)
Workflow diagram

Based upon the book *Getting Things Done* by David Allen. © David Allen
This design by Douglas Johnston for the DIYY Planner (www.DIYPlanner.com)
The major change is....

- Getting EVERYTHING out of your head = 100% of all your “stuff”

(1) Collect it....
- In-baskets
- Note books
- PDA’s
- E-mail
- ....

“Offload what needs to get done into a “bucket”
Collect

- Capture everything that you need to track or remember or act on in what Allen calls a 'bucket'
- Get everything out of your head and into your collection device, ready for processing
- All buckets should be processed to empty at least once per week.
If Not Now When?  
If Not Me Who?

- (2) **Process**
  - Start at top
  - Deal with one item at a time
  - Never put anything back into 'in'
  - If an item requires action
    - Do it (if it takes less than two minutes)
    - Delegate it, or defer it.
  - If not
    - File it for reference
    - Throw it away, or
    - Incubate it for possible action later.
Delegation – 10 Reasons To

1. You can’t do it all.
2. You can reduce your burden.
3. Get more done through others.
4. Best return on your personal investment.
5. Makes you indispensable – and unpromotable!
6. Decrease your stress if you can’t be in office.
7. More time to handle important matters.
8. Helping company grow by developing others.
9. Some jobs might be better done by others.
10. A one person army seldom won anything.
(3) Organizing....

- Trash
- Someday/Maybe
- Reference
- Projects
- Project plans
- Waiting
- Calendar
- Next Actions

>> Empty the in-basket
(4) Review

- Review your lists as often as you need to, to get them off your mind....
- ..... but at least once a week

The weekly review

- Gather and_process all your “stuff”
- Review your system
- Update your lists
- Get clean, clear, current, and complete
- Create a “tickler file” in order to help refresh your memory
Next actions
a.k.a. to do list

The very next physical action you need to take to get something done
Next Actions

Within each context, items to do are

Next Actions

- Break tasks into smaller physical actions
- The next action to move your work along
- Finishing next action may suggest a new next action
Projects

*Project*: any desired result requiring >1 action step

You don’t do projects, they are a measurable result

- GTD projects can be small
- Reminder of what you’re working toward.
- Without the reminder, it will slip back into your brain’s obsession-loop.
Projects and Contexts

- A project often has many next actions
- You can do any of them

Project: Find a general contractor
Next Actions:
  - ask colleagues at work
  - ask neighbor who just finished renovation
  - determine budget
  ...

...
System: “Next Actions” List

- “Action-oriented”
- Tells you what to do
- Complex or Simple
  - Context
  - Due Date
  - Priority
  - “Energy Level”
Premise: “Views” of Life

- 50,000 ft: Life goals
- 40,000 ft: 3-5 year goals
- 30,000 ft: 1-2 year goals
- 20,000 ft: areas of responsibility
- 10,000 ft: personal projects
- Ground-Level: “next actions”
At the beginning of the day, pick up to 3

call caterer for retirement party
draft introduction to #110 budget
email John
buy new stapler
order pins for retirement party
read Jane’s last pay reminder
schedule apt for Jane’s review
google “appreciative inquiry”
email Sue Budez to her questions
talk to Jim re: personnel issue

July 20, 2009
Select the next one that “pops out”

July 20, 2009

call caterer for retirement party

draft introduction to AIP to budget

remind John

by new stapler

order pins for retirement party

read Jane’s last pay stand

schedule apt for Jane’s sermon

google “Appreciative inquiry”

email Sue Buda re: her question

Talk to Jim re: personnel issue
July 20, 2009

- Call caterer for retirement party
- Draft introduction to AP 10 budget
- Email John
- Buy new staples
- Order pins for retirement party
- Read Jane's last pay record
- Schedule appt for Jane's review
- Google "appreciative inquiry"
- Email Sue Budget to her question
- Talk to Jim re: personnel issues

Go to my bank site on line and check balance
Find phone number for the restaurant THEN make re
Read consultant comments re: draft report
Brainstorm ideas for first chapter of manuscript
(5) Do it

- Every decision to act is an intuitive one.

- Most time- and priority- management systems can’t do this for you.

- The challenge is to move from hoping it’s the right choice to trusting it is.
Workflow

Filter incoming stuff from inboxes into:

*Non-actionable items*
- Throw away
- Put into “Someday/Maybe” lists/folders
- Archive in storage

*Actionable items*
- Act on in < 2 minutes,
- Delegate to someone else
- or defer action until later in the appropriate *context*
Results?

- Collecting ALL your “stuff”
  - No stress about forgetting
- Doing the “next action”
  - Greater productivity
  - Greater peace of mind
What if I still have negative feelings or stress?

- Don’t make the agreement
- Complete the agreement
- Re-negotiate the agreement
- Just let some things go!!
More Tools

- Tips and Tools from www.davidco.com
- Lifehacker.com
- Getting Things Done Outlook Add-In
  - http://gtdsupport.netcentrics.com
- GTD for Lotus Notes
- GTD for Blackberry
  - www.blackberryinsight.com
SO, ... HOW'S YOUR DAY GOING?
Thank you