

# Getting Things Done the art of stress-free productivity

from the New York Times bestselling author

# David Allen



Stress free productivity  
Getting things done  
By Davin Alen

Brief  
Book Summary  
Extracted  
By S K Anilkumar

- What is that we do need to do ..
- (1) capturing all the things that need to get done—now, later, someday, big, little, or in between—into a logical and. trusted system outside of your head and off your mind; and
- (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 momen



- Why is it important now..
- Work no longer has clear boundaries and
- there are more and more new demands on very scarce resources..
- lack of edges can create more work for everyone.
- Many of today's organizational outcomes require cross-divisional communication, cooperation, and engagement.
- Our individual office/home/work silos are crumbling



- Which of you are doing only what you were hired to do ? ? ?
- 
- The hurrier I go, the behinder I get.—Anonymous
- The Old Models and Habits Are Insufficient
- Neither our standard education, nor traditional time-management models, nor the plethora of organizing tools available are adequate
- Current tools and techniques apparently are unable to accommodate the speed, complexity, and changing priority factors inherent in what needs to be got done
-



- The winds and waves are always on the side of the ablest navigators.—Edward Gibbon
- Life is denied by lack of attention, whether it be to cleaning windows or trying to write a masterpiece —Nadia Boulanger
- Your ability to generate power is directly proportional to your ability to relax.
- Rowers have a word for this frictionless state: swing. . . . World-class rower Craig Lambert has described how it feels in *Mind Over Water* (Houghton Mifflin, 1998)
- Recall the pure joy of riding on a backyard swing: an easy cycle of motion, the momentum coming from the swing itself.

- The swing carries us; we do not force it. We pump our legs to drive our arc higher, but gravity does most of the work. We are not so much swinging as being swung. The boat swings you. The shell wants to move fast: Speed sings in its lines and nature. Our job is simply to work with the shell, to stop holding it back with our thrashing struggles to go faster. Trying too hard sabotages boat speed. Trying becomes striving and striving undoes itself. Social climbers strive to be aristocrats but their efforts prove them no such thing. Aristocrats do not strive; they have already arrived. Swing is a state of arrival



- Imagine throwing a pebble into a still pond. How does the water respond?
- The answer is, totally appropriately to the force and mass of the input; then it returns to calm. It doesn't overreact or underreact.
- The power in a karate punch comes from speed, not muscle; it comes from a focused “pop” at the end of the whip
- If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything; it is open to everything.—Shunryu Suzuki

- Anything that causes you to overreact or underreact can control you, and often does
- There is one thing we can do, and the happiest people are those who can do it to the limit of their ability. We can be completely present.
- We can be all here. We can . . . give all our attention to the opportunity before us.—Mark Van Doren
- And if you get seriously far out of that state—and start to feel out of control, stressed out, unfocused, bored, and stuck—do you have the ability to get yourself back into it?
-



- stress people experience comes from inappropriately managed commitments they make or accept.
- 
- Open loops... You've probably made many more agreements with yourself than you realize, and every single one of them. big or little—is being tracked by a less-than-conscious part of you. These are the “incompletes,” or “open loops,” anything pulling at your attention that doesn't belong where it is, the way it is
-

- The Basic Requirements for Managing Commitments
- Implement these basic activities and behaviors:•
- First of all, if it's on your mind, your mind isn't clear. Anything you consider unfinished in any way must be captured in a trusted system outside your mind, or what I call a collection bucket, that you know you'll come back to regularly and sort through.•
- Second, you must clarify exactly what your commitment is and decide what you have to do, if anything, to make progress toward fulfilling it.•
- 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



- What most “bugs” you, distracts you, or interests you, or in some other way consumes a large part of your conscious attention? It may be a project or problem that is really “in your face,” something you are being pressed to handle, or a situation you feel you must deal with sooner rather than later. What would need to happen for you to check this “project” off as “done. Now write down the very next physical action required to move the situation forward. Now do that one thing to resolve this.!
- Think like a man of action, act like a man of thought.
- —Henry Bergson

- You have to think about your stuff more than you realize but not as much as you're afraid you might. As Peter Drucker has written, "In knowledge work . . . the task is not given; it has to be determined. 'What are the expected results from this work?' is . . . the key question in making knowledge workers productive. And it is a question that demands risky decisions. There is usually no right answer; there are choices instead. And results have to be clearly specified, if productivity is to be achieved."
- The ancestor of every action is a thought



- Thinking in a concentrated manner to define desired outcomes is something few people feel they have to do. But in truth, outcome thinking is one of the most effective means available for making wishes reality
- Why Things Are on Your Mind
- Most often, the reason something is “on your mind” is that you want it to be different than it currently is, and yet:
  - you haven’t clarified exactly what the intended outcome is;
  - you haven’t decided what the very next physical action step is; and/or
  - you haven’t put reminders of the outcome and the action required in a system you trust.

- That's why it's on your mind. Until those thoughts have been clarified and those decisions made, and the resulting data has been stored in a system that you absolutely know you will think about as often as you need to, your brain can't give up the job. You can fool everyone else, but you can't fool your own mind. It knows whether or not you've come to the conclusions you need to, and whether you've put the resulting outcomes and action reminders in a place that can be trusted to resurface appropriately within your conscious mind. If you haven't done those things, it won't quit working overtime





- This constant, unproductive preoccupation with all the things we have to do is the single largest consumer of time and energy.—Kerry Gleeson
- Your Mind Doesn't Have a Mind of Its Own
- At least a portion of your mind is really kind of stupid, in an interesting way. If it had any innate intelligence, it would remind you of the things you needed to do only when you could do something about them..did you think of anything you needed to do that you still haven't done? Have you had that thought more than once? Why?

- It's a waste of time and energy to keep thinking about something that you make no progress on. And it only adds to your anxieties about what you should be doing and aren't doing..
- We need to transform all the “stuff” we're trying to organize into actionable stuff we need to do...outcomes and actions—
- Manage action. What you do with your time, what you do with information, and what you do with your body and your focus relative to your priorities—those are the real options to which you must allocate your limited resources.



- The real issue is how to make appropriate choices about what to do at any point in time. The real issue is how we manage action
- It's extremely difficult to manage actions you haven't identified or decided on.
- the real problem is a lack of clarity and definition about what is the expected outcome and what action is warranted
- Things rarely get stuck because of lack of time. They get stuck because the doing of them has not been defined
-

- Vision is not enough; it must be combined with venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps; we must step up the stairs.—Vaclav Havel
- You need to control commitments, projects, and actions in two ways—horizontally and vertically. “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.
- There is usually an inverse proportion between how much something is on your mind and how much it’s getting done



- There is no reason ever to have the same thought twice, unless you like having that thought
- The short-term-memory part of your mind—the part that tends to hold all of the incomplete, undecided, and unorganized “stuff”—functions much like RAM on a personal computer...and if there is too much it slows down everything...
- The big problem is that your mind keeps reminding you of things when you can't do anything about them. It has no sense of past or future. Everything you've told yourself you ought to do, it thinks you should be doing right now

- generated personal failure, because you can't do them both at the same time. This produces an all-pervasive stress factor whose source can't be pin-pointed
- When we deal with our work... 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. This constitutes the management of the “horizontal” aspect of our lives—incorporating everything that has our attention at any time





- But..Most people have major leaks in their collection process. Many have collected things but haven't processed or decided what action to take about them. Others make good decisions about "stuff" in the moment but lose the value of that thinking because they don't efficiently organize the results. Still others have good systems but don't review them consistently enough to keep them functional. Finally, if any one of these links is weak, what someone is likely to choose to do at any point in time may not be the best option



- It's important to know what needs to be collected and how to collect it most effectively so you can process it appropriately
- you have to know that you have truly captured everything that might represent something you have to do, and that at some point in the near future you will process and review all of it.
- Gathering 100 Percent of the “Incompletes !!
- In order to eliminate “holes in the bucket,” you need to collect and gather together placeholders for or representations of all the things you consider incomplete in your world



- you've been "collecting" things in your environment and in your psyche that don't belong where they are, the way they are, for all eternity. Even though it may not be as obviously "in your face" as your e-mail, this "stuff" still requires some kind of resolution—a loop to be closed, something to be done.



- As soon as you attach a “should,” “need to,” or “ought to” to an item, it becomes an incomplete This includes all of your “I’m going to”s, where you’ve decided to do something but haven’t started moving on it yet. And it certainly includes all pending and in-progress items, as well as those things on which you’ve done everything you’re ever going to do except acknowledge that you’re finished with them
- Physical in-basket• Paper-based note-taking devices• Electronic note-taking devices• Voice-recording devices• E-mail..are all collection container



- Every open loop must be in your collection system and out of your head.
- You must have as few collection buckets as you can get by with.
- You must empty them regularly
- These collection tools should become part of your life-style. Keep them close by so no matter where you are you can collect a potentially valuable thought—think of them as being as indispensable as your toothbrush or your driver's license or your glasses

-

- You should have as many in-baskets as you need and as few as you can get by with. If you have too many collection zones, however, you won't be able to process them easily or consistently
- Men of lofty genius when they are doing the least work are the most active. —Leonardo da Vinci
-



- The final success factor for collecting should be obvious: if you don't empty and process the "stuff" you've collected, your buckets aren't serving you....Emptying the bucket does not mean that you have to finish what's in your voice-mail, e-mail, or in-basket; it just means you have to take it out of the container decide what it is and what should be done with it, and, if it's still unfinished, organize it into your system



- In order for you to get “in” to empty, your total action-management system must be in place. Too much “stuff” is left piled in in-baskets because of a lack of effective systems “downstream” from there. It often seems easier to leave things in “in” when you know you have to do something about them but can’t do it right then. Unfortunately, that safety net is lost when the piles get out of control or the inventory gets too extensive.





- Many people try to “get organized” but make the mistake of doing it with incomplete batches of “stuff.” You can’t organize what’s incoming—you can only collect it and process it. Instead, you organize the actions you’ll need to take based on the decisions you’ve made about what needs to be done
- It does not take much strength to do things, but it requires a great deal of strength to decide what to do.—Elbert Hubbard



- Is It Actionable?
- There are two possible answers for this: YES and NO
- Two things need to be determined about each actionable item: 1. What “project” or outcome have you committed to? & 2. What’s the next action required
- If no Action Required,..... there are three possibilities: 1. It’s trash, no longer needed. 2. No action is needed now, but something might need to be done later (incubate). 3. The item is potentially useful information that might be needed for something later (reference)



- If action required .....Do It, Delegate It, or Defer It  
Once you've decided on the next action, you have three options:
  1. | Do it. If an action will take less than two minutes, it should be done at the moment it is defined.
  2. | Delegate it. If the action will take longer than two minutes, ask yourself, Am I the right person to do this? If the answer is no, delegate it to the appropriate entity.
  3. | Defer it. If the action will take longer than two minutes, and you are the right person to do it, you will have to defer acting on it until later and track it on one or more "Next Actions" lists



- for nonactionable items, the possible categories are trash, incubation tools, and reference storage. If no action is needed on something, you toss it, “tickle” it for later reassessment, or file it so you can find the material if you need to refer to it at another time
- project is any desired result that requires more than one action step...if one step won't complete something, some kind of stake needs to be placed in the ground to remind you that there's something still left to do.
- If you don't have a placeholder to remind you about it, it will slip back



- You don't actually do a project; you can only do action steps related to it. When enough of the right action steps have been taken, some situation will have been created that matches your initial picture of the outcome closely enough that you can call it "done"
- That action needs to be the next physical, visible behavior, without exception, on every open loop.
-

- Any less-than-two-minute actions that you perform, and all other actions that have already been completed, do not, of course, need to be tracked; they're done. What does need to be tracked is every action that has to happen at a specific time or on a specific day (enter these in your calendar); those that need to be done as soon as they can (add these to your "Next Actions" lists); and all those that you are waiting for others to do (put these on a "Waiting For" list





- Reminders of actions you need to take fall into two categories: those about things that have to happen on a specific day or time, and those about things that just need to get done as soon as possible.. Three things go on your calendar:• time-specific actions;• day-specific actions; and• day-specific information
- Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be bent out of shape.—Michael McGriffy,
-

- calendar should be sacred territory. If you write something there, it must get done that day or not at all
- Any longer-than-two-minute, nondelegatable action you have identified needs to be tracked somewhere. The “Next Actions” List
- Any longer-than-two-minute, nondelegatable action you have identified needs to be tracked somewhere
- Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.—Albert Einstein

-



- You need well-organized, discrete systems to handle the items that require no action as well as the ones that do. No-action systems fall into three categories: trash, incubation, and reference
- “Someday/Maybe” It can be useful and inspiring to maintain an ongoing list of things you might want to do at some point but not now
- you must review this list periodically if you’re going to get the most value from it. I suggest you include a scan of the contents in your Weekly Review



- Many things that come your way require no action but have intrinsic value as information. You will want to keep and be able to retrieve these as needed
- The most important thing to remember here is that reference should be exactly that—information that can be easily referred to when required. Reference systems generally take two forms: (1) topic- and area-specific storage, and (2) general-reference files





- You need to be able to review the whole picture of your life and work at appropriate intervals and appropriate levels. For most people the magic of workflow management is realized in the consistent use of the review phase
- At any point in time, knowing what has to get done, and when, creates a terrain for maneuvering. It's a good habit, as soon as you conclude an action on your calendar (a meeting, a phone call, the final draft of a report), to check and see what else remains to be done.
- Review your lists as often as you need to, to get them off your mind

- The affairs of life embrace a multitude of interests, and he who reasons in any one of them, without consulting the rest, is a visionary unsuited to control the business of the world.—James Fenimore Cooper
- Every decision to act is an intuitive one. The challenge is to migrate from hoping it's the right choice to trusting it's the right choice... immediately increasing your speed and effectiveness



- If you have collected , processed, organized, and reviewed all your current commitments, you can galvanize your intuitive judgment with some intelligent and practical thinking about your work and values.
- You have more to do than you can possibly do. You just need to feel good about your choices
- There are four criteria you can apply, in this order:
  1. | Context
  2. | Time available
  3. | Energy available
  - 4 | Priority

- there are three different kinds of activities you can be engaged in:
  - Doing predefined work
  - Doing work as it shows up
  - Defining your work
- Predefined Work When you're doing predefined work, you're working off your "Next Actions" lists—completing tasks that you have previously determined need to be done, managing your workflow
- Doing Work as It Shows Up Often things come up ad hoc—unsuspected, unforeseen—that you either have to or choose to respond to as they occurs. Defining your work entails clearing up your in-basket, your e-mail, your voice-mail, and your meeting notes and breaking down new projects into actionable step









- **Runway: Current Actions** This is the accumulated list of all the actions you need to take—all the phone calls you have to make, the e-mails you have to respond to, the errands you've got to run, and the agendas you want to communicate to your boss and your spouse.
- **10,000 Feet: Current Projects** Creating many of the actions that you currently have in front of you are the thirty to one hundred projects on your plate.
-

- 20,000 Feet: Areas of Responsibility You create or accept most of your projects because of your responsibilities, which for most people can be defined in ten to fifteen categories
- 30,000 Feet: One- to Two-Year Goals What you want to be experiencing in the various areas of your life and work one to two years from now will add another dimension to defining your work
- 40,000 Feet: Three- to Five-Year Vision Projecting three to five years into the future generates thinking about bigger categories: organization strategies, environmental trends, career and life-transition circumstances
-



- 50,000+ Feet: Life This is the “big picture” view. Why does your company exist? Why do you exist? The primary purpose for anything provides the core definition of what its “work” really is



- You've got to think about the big things while you're doing small things, so that all the small things go in the right direction.

- —Alvin Toffler

- 

-



- **THE KEY INGREDIENTS** of relaxed control are (1) clearly defined outcomes (projects) and the next actions required to move them toward closure, and (2) reminders placed in a trusted system that is reviewed regularly That's about horizontal focus.
- Sometimes, however, you may need greater rigor and focus to get a project under control, to identify a solution, or to ensure that all the right steps have been determined. This is where vertical focus comes in



- The goal is to get projects and situations off your mind, but not to lose any potentially useful ideas
- The good news is, there is a productive way to think about projects, situations, and topics that creates maximum value with minimal expenditure of time and effort. It happens to be the way we naturally think and plan, though not necessarily the way we normally plan when we consciously try to get a project under control



- The most experienced planner in the world is your brain.
- 
- 1. | Defining purpose and principles2. | Outcome visioning3. | Brainstorming4. | Organizing5. | Identifying next action
-

- Choose one project that is new or stuck or that could simply use some improvement. Think of your purpose. Think of what a successful outcome would look like: where would you be physically, financially, in terms of reputation, or whatever? Brainstorm potential steps. Organize your ideas. Decide on the next actions. Are you any clearer about where you want to go and how to get there





- If you're waiting to have a good idea before you have any ideas, you won't have many ideas
- When you find yourself in a hole, stop digging Will Rogers..Don't just do something. Stand there. Be still -Rochelle Myer
- Fanaticism consists of redoubling your efforts when you have forgotten your aim.-George Santayana
- Celebrate any progress. Don't wait to get perfect -Ann McGee Cooper

- 
- Purpose :
- It never hurts to ask the “why?” question. Almost anything you’re currently doing can be enhanced and even galvanized by more scrutiny at this top level of focus. Why
- Principles :
- Of equal value as prime criteria for driving and directing a project are the standards and values you hold



- Simple, clear purpose and principles give rise to complex and intelligent behavior. Complex rules and regulations give rise to simple and stupid behavior.-Dee Hock
- We know that the focus we hold in our minds affects what we perceive and how we perform
- Imagination is more important than knowledge.- Albert Einstein
- Vision/Outcome :
- In order most productively to access the conscious and unconscious resources available to you, you must have a clear picture in your mind of what success would look, sound, and feel like

- Your automatic creative mechanism is teleological. That is, it operates in terms of goals and end results. Once you give it a definite goal to achieve, you can depend upon its automatic guidance system to take you to that goal much better than “you” ever could by conscious thought. “You” supply the goal by thinking in terms of end results. Your automatic mechanism then supplies the means whereby.-  
Maxwell Maltz

- Nothing is more dangerous than an idea when it is the only one you have.
- —Emile Chartie



- Clarifying Outcomes :
- There is a simple but profound principle that emerges from understanding the way your perceptive filters work: you won't see how to do it until you see yourself doing it
- You often need to make it up in your mind before you can make it happen in your life
- I always wanted to be somebody. I should have been more specific.-Lily Tomlin

- Here are three basic steps for developing a vision:
  1. View the project from beyond the completion date.
  2. Envision “WILD SUCCESS”! (Suspend “Yeah, but . . .”)
  3. Capture features, aspects, qualities you imagine in place
- The best way to get a good idea is to get lots of ideas.-Linus Pauling
- Brainstorming :
- Once you know what you want to have happen, and why, the “how” mechanism is brought into play. When you identify with some picture in your mind that is different from your current reality, you automatically start filling in the gaps, or brainstorming ideas



- give yourself permission to capture and express any idea, and then later on figure out how it fits in and what to do with it. If nothing else (and there is plenty of “else”), this practice adds to your efficiency—when you have the idea, you grab it, which means you won’t have to go “have the idea” again
- Distributed Cognition
- The great thing about external brainstorming is that in addition to capturing your original ideas, it can help generate many new ones that might not have occurred to you if you didn’t have a mechanism to hold your thoughts and continually reflect them back to you.

- Only he who handles his ideas lightly is master of his ideas, and only he who is master of his ideas is not enslaved by them.-Lin Yutan
- The basics principles for Brain storming, however, can be summed up as follows:
  - Don't judge, challenge, evaluate, or criticize.
  - Go for quantity, not quality.
  - Put analysis and organization in the background
- good way to find out what something might be is to uncover all the things it's probably not



- The greater the volume of thoughts you have to work with, the better the context you can create for developing options and trusting your choices
- Just make sure to grab all that and keep going until you get into the weeding and organizing of focus that make up the next stage
- Organizing -once you get all the ideas out of your head and in front of your eyes, you'll automatically notice natural relationships and structure
-

- Basics of Organizing : The key steps here are:
  - Identify the significant pieces.
  - Sort by (one or more):
    - components
    - sequence, priorities
    - Detail to the required degree
    -
- Plans get you into things but you've got to work your way out.-Will Roger



- The thinking must go to the specifics of the vision. Again, ask yourself, “What would the outcome look like
- You need no new skills to increase your productivity—just a new set of behaviors about when and where to apply them
-





