

Notes and expansions on David Allen's book

Getting Things Done (GTD): The Art of Stress-Free Productivity

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Overview

- **The Problems**

- You feel... like you're not using your time wisely (enough), not getting enough done;
- scatter-brained and disorganized and have the sinking feeling that you're forgetting something;
- like your mind is bubbling and racing and it's hard to get it to relax;
- that it's difficult to figure out how to get started on your projects;
- stress and guilt from inappropriately managed commitments and broken agreements with yourself;
- too busy with your mundane tasks to get around to your more creative, fun projects.

- **A Solution**

- Use a good Action Management System and learn the art of stress-free productivity,
 - * applying common sense and things you're probably already doing in a radically comprehensive way,
 - * so... your mind is relieved of the tasks for which it is ill-suited;
 - * you can gain, with trust in your system, a positive, relaxed focus – with a mind like water;
 - * you can empower your inner adult and then free your inner child (responsible/productive/creative/etc.).

- **Key Elements** of Action Management System¹

- 1) 100% Capture system
 - * tools/"buckets" to capture & collect all your ideas, concerns, messages, objects requiring your attention, & any other "incompletes"/"open loops" in your life, including resources for support/reference
- 2) Comprehensive Review system
 - * an organized system, physical & digital, to place all your "incompletes" & support material (from jobs *and* personal life), consisting of filing/labeling system, next-actions lists, other lists, & support/references
- 3) Honed Trigger system
 - * devices & lists to trigger actions, reviews, & ideas at the right times (reminder & alarm systems, calendar for "now or never" actions only, checklists & inventories to provoke thought)
- 4) Effective Strategy system (for using the above physical systems)
 - * concepts, tactics, and tricks that keep you effective and foil psychological traps
 - a) To achieve 100% capture, have "buckets" (tools/paper&pen) w/ you at all times (as essential as eye-glasses)
 - b) Use concepts of the stages of Work-flow and Process-flow (natural planning) with main focus on successful-outcome visioning and determining next physical actions (next actions list) also with emphasis on being aware of purpose ("why am I doing this?") and non-judgemental free brainstorming to unleash creativity
 - c) Continuous or regularly occurring processing sessions of captured and collected "incompletes" so that actions get managed (do/defer/delegate/drop) regularly
 - d) Weekly review, Yearly purge and higher-level review

- **Book Organization**

- Part 1: Concepts and Philosophy (read it, and read all the fun deep quotes in the margins of the book)
- Part 2: Practical Run-Through (skim it and come back after part 3)
- Part 3: Profound Effects (read it)

¹I took the liberty of adding the term "trigger system" to fill out what I consider to be the four major elements of Allen's Action Management System. The trigger system could be subsumed as a subset within the review system.

Action Management System: Idea/Action/Support/Reference/Information/Outcome/Life Management

Strategy:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Tricks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · “put it in front of the door” so you <i>can’t</i> miss/forget it; “costuming”; play-with-tools, physical tools and visual cues to keep your thinking anchored; make-it-feel-good, make-it-quick-and-easy – filing system; in-baskets: top item first, one item at a time, nothing goes back to “in”.
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Further Notes

- “Incompletes”/“Open loops”/“To-be-organized’s”: anything w/ a “should”, “need-to”, or “ought-to” attached:
 - things that should be or are in the in-baskets (ideas to be captured/recorded, papers/objects to collect, etc.),
 - tasks/“stuff” that whiz by the in-baskets and are to be done or taken care of immediately,
 - filed ideas, actionables, and objects awaiting review and action.
- “Stuff” is
 - text: to be acted upon (processed & done/delegated/dropped) and/or organized (filed appropriately): notes (referring to ideas, actions, or objects), messages (from others with suggestions, requests, comments, jokes), documents (to be viewed and/or possibly filed), etc.
 - objects: to be acted upon (processed & fixed/installed/trashed/etc.) and/or organized (placed appropriately): gadgets, coupons, supplies, decor, memorabilia, etc.

Expansion and Example

David Allen’s *Getting Things Done* system does not address every problem one may have in attempting to manage one’s life & actions (& psychology). Management should be easier the closer one comes to having a rational philosophy of reality & life that fully incorporates knowledge & feeling of one’s emotions/habits/behaviors, a philosophy upon which one can base practical life-improving concepts, efforts, & “life hacking”. Also, becoming involved in or creating an organization or community devoted to self-improvement should help. As you begin to “master the mundane”, you’ll begin to have more time/energy to investigate further improvements, within areas such as health/diet/sleep/exercise, rationality, emotional self-integration, behavior/mood regulation, incentive management, schedule design, etc.

Getting back to Allen’s management system – it would be valuable to find software that implements his ideas for review & trigger systems. There are many programs that are GTD-compatible, but it’s probably best to focus on getting started rather than finding the perfect implementation. Here’s my first implementation:

Example: My First Action Management System

System	Tools and Computer Files	Notes
Capture	Buckets In-Baskets	pocket paper & pen; desk paper; mobile phone (notes, to-do, audio) physical; virtual <code>InBasket_Folder</code> , <code>InBasket_Textfile</code> , email in-boxes
Review	passive reminding: <code>ActionList_Current</code> <code>ActionList_Pending</code> <code>ActionList_Other</code> <code>IdeaAction_DatedReview</code> <code>IdeaAction_SomedayMaybe</code> <code>IdeaAction_Waiting</code> <code>IdeaAction_Rejected</code> Support/Reference files	recorded actions/ideas to be reviewed/done/(re)organized/(re)processed (approximately “today’s actions”, a relatively short, clean list) (the actions waiting in the wings, immediately after current actions) (action sublists, e.g., <code>ActionList_Shopping</code> , <code>ActionList_Research</code> , etc.) (ideas/actions that should be reviewed/processed on a certain date) (ideas/actions that I (might) want to do/think about someday) (delegated ideas/actions, waiting for certain conditions) (record of rejected ideas/actions, b/c you might want to remember them later) (projects, which may require action sublists, may have support/reference)
Trigger	active reminding & stoking: Alarm/Reminder systems Calendar <code>CheckList_Priorities</code> <code>CheckList_Policies</code> <code>Inventory_Material</code> <code>Inventory_Immaterial</code> <code>Inventory_Financial</code> <code>Notes_ActionMgmtSystem</code> <code>Notes_SelfObservation</code> <code>Notes_Vision</code>	now-or-never actions, idea creation (phone & computer clocks/timers/alarms, could use automated email/texting) (including only “now or never” actions, only to be done on the day listed) (values, responsibilities) (principles/policies to live by or test out) (material possessions) (immaterial possessions: attributes, memories/experiences, skills, etc.) (financial possessions: could be mix of material and immaterial) (these notes could be in “Self-Management Project” files) (notice patterns, create tricks) (vision for life or management system)