

10 Ways To Get Things Done

Do you struggle to get things done?

According to David Allen, bestselling author of ***Getting things done***, no matter what the setting, there are 5 stages we need to go through to get through our tasks:

'We 1. *collect* things that command our attentions; 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*.' [Visit David's website to download a chart illustrating these 5 stages.](#)

Unfortunately, one of the major reasons many people haven't had a lot of success with getting organised, is simply that they have tried to do all 5 stages at the same time. For example, when they sit down to 'make a list' they try to collect the most important things in some order that reflects priorities and sequences, without setting out many or any real actions to take.

Here are 10 tips to help manage each of these stages:

1. **Gather together 100% of all things incomplete in your world:**

To eliminate any 'holes in the bucket' and get on top of *everything* undone - personal or professional, big or little, urgent or of minor importance - gather *all of* your 'stuff' together using a collection device and make sure it's somewhere physical, other than your head. For example, use a physical in-basket, e-mail, paper-based note-taking, electronic note-taking or a voice-recording device. Most people have several collection devices operating at once and are more or less out of control. Allen suggests the following three requirements to get this phase working effectively

1. Capture every 'open loop' (thing undone) into your collection system and out of your head;
2. Use as few collection buckets or devices as you can get by with; and
3. Empty these buckets regularly.

2. **Work out what it is:**

The next important step is to work out what 'stuff' is and what to do about it. Ask yourself, '*Is this 'stuff' actionable?*'

3. **If the 'stuff' is actionable, there are three possibilities:**

1. If it's trash and no longer needed, eliminate it.
2. If no action is needed now, but something might need to be done someday later, incubate it in a 'tickler' file or calendar these actions. Examples might be books to read, wine to taste, things to do with the kids.
3. If the item is potentially useful information that might be needed for something later, reference it in a good filing system so it can be easily retrieved when required. Allen recommends one, simple A - Z alphabetical filing system to be used to file everything by topic, project, person or company so a document can be in only 3 or 4 places if you forget exactly where you put it. Also, get rid of hanging files if you can and use just plain folders standing up by themselves in your filing drawer or bookshelves.

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4. **If the 'stuff' is *not* actionable, two things need to be decided:**

1. What project or outcome have you committed to?
2. What's the next action required?

5. **If it's about a project:**

If the actionable item relates to a project (where a project means any desired result that requires more than one action step), capture the outcome you've committed to on a 'Projects List.' For example, publish book, update will or finalise budgets. Projects don't need to be listed in any particular order. Just create a master list so you can review it regularly enough to ensure appropriate next actions are being defined for each project. Each project listed will serve as a stake in the ground that reminds you that you have an 'open loop.' A weekly review of the list will bring this item back to you as something that's still outstanding. It will stay fresh and alive in your management system until it is completed or eliminated. Your 'Projects List' will be merely an index. All of the details, plans and supporting information that you may need as you work on each project should be contained in separate file folders, computer files, notebooks or binders.

6. **What's the next action?:** The 'next action' is the next physical, visible activity that needs to be engaged in to move the current situation toward completion. For example, 'Talk to Angela about the filing system we need to set up' or 'Research database management software on the Web'.

7. **Will the next action take *less than 2 minutes* to do?:**

If yes, do it the moment it's defined!

8. **Will the next action take *more than 2 minutes* to do?:**

If yes, ask yourself '*Am I the right person to do it?*'

9. **Delegate it:**

If you're not the right person to do the next action, delegate it to whoever is.

10. **Defer it:**

If you are the right person to do the next action and it will take longer than 2 minutes to do, defer acting on it immediately. For every action that needs to happen at a specific time or on a specific day - enter these in your calendar or diary. Those actions that need to be done as soon as they can - add these to your 'Next Actions List'. And, all those that you are waiting for others to do, put those on a 'Waiting For List'.

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