

Getting Things Done
the art of stress-free
productivity

from the New York Times bestselling author

David Allen



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"The Bible of business and personal productivity" —*Lifehack*

"A completely revised and updated edition of the blockbuster bestseller from 'the personal productivity guru'" —*Fast Company*

Since it was first published almost fifteen years ago, David Allen's *Getting Things Done* has become one of the most influential business books of its era, and the ultimate book on personal organization. "GTD" is now shorthand for an entire way of approaching professional and personal tasks, and has spawned an entire culture of websites, organizational tools, seminars, and offshoots.

Allen has rewritten the book from start to finish, tweaking his classic text with important perspectives on the new workplace, and adding material that will make the book fresh and relevant for years to come. This new edition of *Getting Things Done* will be welcomed not only by its hundreds of thousands of existing fans but also by a whole new generation eager to adopt its proven principles.

Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity Details

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From Reader Review Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity for online ebook

Jamie says

Ironically, looking in to the GTD (Getting Things Done) system has been bouncing around in the back of my head as something to do for quite some time now. This approach to maximizing productivity is popular among the nerdegalian, probably because of its minimum bullshit approach to actually processing, classifying, and executing what the author David Allen calls "stuff to do." This book discusses the GTD system in its entirety and, more importantly, teaches you how to put it in place.

What I really liked about Allen's work is that it's very straight forward and focused on implementation. It seems like other self-help books in this vein that I've perused are all about inspiration, defining values, motivating yourself, getting in touch with your inner being and letting loose the full potential of you. To those authors I'd like to say the following: No. Stop it. I don't need nor want that, so you can cram it with walnuts, buddy. GTD, in comparison, is prescriptive. Allen gets touchy-feeling in a few places (such as discussing prioritization or project definition) but the vast majority of the book takes a very practical approach to digging yourself out of whatever mountain of commitments you've gotten yourself under and how to stay on top of it once you get there.

In short, GTD focuses on getting "stuff" --commitments, to do items, reminders to gather information, requests for information or actions, etc.-- out of your short-term memory and into a physical, highly organized system that will remind you of the right stuff at the right time. Dumping everything out of your short-term memory allows you to do something that's very critical to productivity: focus on one thing at a time. If you're confident that your other commitments or to-dos are safely stored away somewhere and will not be lost or buried out of sight, you can devote all your attention, time, and mental energy to one thing before knocking it out and moving on to the next. I like to think of the system as an artificial, external, and infinitely scalable attention span that you can connect to and disconnect from as needed.

That's all well and good, but it's probably not beyond the ken of your average retarded monkey. The tough (and in some places nonintuitive) part is the implementation. Again, there's tons more detail, tricks, and tips in the book, but I'll try to capture the gist of it. There are four major parts to the GTD system:

1. Collecting incoming stuff
2. Processing the stuff
3. Doing the stuff
4. Regularly reviewing your system to make sure your action items and project lists are up to date

Collecting stuff is easy. That's just letting stuff accumulate in your physical or virtual receptacles like inboxes, voice mail, or e-mail.

Processing stuff is more involved. It requires sitting down with your inboxes and emptying them. That doesn't mean immediately doing the work associated with each piece of stuff as you pick it up --prioritization is important. It means taking a piece of stuff --an e-mail, a document, a voice mail-- and doing something with it: act on it right then, file it, trash it, delegate it, or create what Allen calls a "Next Action" item associated with it. Again, the book is replete with practical tips, hacks, tools, and rules of thumb for deciding which of these things to do and how to keep it all straight. Therein lies some of the book's best value, but it's too detailed to go into here.

Doing the stuff is self explanatory, but again I'll emphasize the value of being able to focus on one thing at a

time without worrying that other things will be forgotten. It's much more productive and much less stressful.

Regularly reviewing your system is also important, and comes in two flavors: as needed and weekly. You may review your action item list (a.k.a., your "to do list") several times a day as needed, if for nothing but that endorphin rush that comes with checking things off as "done" and deciding what to tackle next. Weekly reviews are also important, and are different in that you take the time to check on your list of active projects and make sure you have a Next Action item for each and every one.

So I really like the book and its system. I'd recommend it to anyone who feels like they're not being productive enough or getting buried in work. Allen only gets mushy and non-specific in a few places that make it seem like he's trying to pad the page count, but the majority of the book is specific, direct, and practical. I also like that Allen is in tune with the modern technology that most professionals encounter. He spends appropriate amounts of time discussing things like e-mail, Outlook and voice mail. He also talks about implementing GTD with high-tech tools like PDAs, Web 2.0 systems, and palmtop computers, but while GTD lends itself well to these kinds of toys, at its heart it is technology agnostic. You could do the whole thing quite effectively with a pen, some paper, and a bunch of file folders. Indeed, some parts of the system, like the tickler file work best that way.

Michael Finocchiaro says

Probably the best self-help book I ever read - in any case the one I most adapted to the organization of my life. It does not have an annoying religious aura to it like 7 Habits or the selfish haberdashery spirit of How to Win Friends and Influence People, but is down to earth and highly practical. I was able to get to Inbox Zero and have held on to that principal for years now. If folks are interested, I can repost here my own adaptation of the techniques. Still for me a reference!

Tracy Miller says

I'm listening to this because I need to get a grip on my life.

I can't even focus enough to listen about how to get my life together, much less do it.

Hannah says

I like reading about organizing my life and being more productive, but I think the major lessons of this book could have been condensed in a page or two. Here are the things I remember:

- 2 minute rule: if you remember to do something and it takes you less than two minutes to do it, just go ahead and do it
- write things down in lists so that they don't float around your head and nag at you all of the time
- check your lists frequently and often, actually doing the things on the list (or delegating them, or archiving the info), otherwise you will lose faith in the system and it will never work
- get a filing cabinet, label-maker, and shredder; create a simple filing system and use your filing system often
- "tickler system" is a series of files for each day of the year. You file stuff away to be reminded or "tickled"

on that specific day (i.e. magazine subscription renewal, buying tickets to a play, etc)

Jarrotrainque says

With first-chapter allusions to martial arts, "flow," "mind like water," and other concepts borrowed from the East (and usually mangled), you'd almost think this self-helper from David Allen should have been called Zen and the Art of Schedule Maintenance./ Not quite. Yes, Getting Things Done offers a complete system for downloading all those free-floating gotta-do's clogging your brain into a sophisticated framework of files and action lists--all purportedly to free your mind to focus on whatever you're working on. However, it still operates from the decidedly Western notion that if we could just get really, really organized, we could turn ourselves into 24//7 productivity machines. (To wit, Allen, whom the New Economy bible Fast Company has dubbed "the personal productivity guru," suggests that instead of meditating on crouching tigers and hidden dragons while you wait for a plane, you should unsheathe that high-tech saber known as the cell phone and attack that list of calls you need to return.)/ As whole-life-organizing systems go, Allen's is pretty good, even fun and therapeutic. It starts with the exhortation to take every unaccounted-for scrap of paper in your workstation that you can't junk, The next step is to write down every unaccounted-for gotta-do cramming your head onto its own scrap of paper. Finally, throw the whole stew into a giant "in-basket"/ That's where the processing and prioritizing begin; in Allen's system, it get a little convoluted at times, rife as it is with fancy terms, subterms, and sub-subterms for even the simplest concepts. Thank goodness the spine of his system is captured on a straightforward, one-page flowchart that you can pin over your desk and repeatedly consult without having to refer back to the book. That alone is worth the purchase price. Also of value is Allen's ingenious Two-Minute Rule: if there's anything you absolutely must do that you can do right now in two minutes or less, then do it now, thus freeing up your time and mind tenfold over the long term. It's commonsense advice so obvious that most of us completely overlook it, much to our detriment; Allen excels at dispensing such wisdom in this useful, if somewhat belabored, self-improver aimed at everyone from CEOs to soccer moms (who we all know are more organized than most CEOs to start with). --Timothy Murphy/

Saud Omar says

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Peter says

Time-Management

This is the best Self-Help Productivity book ever written. Well, I think so and I've been using it for 13 years. It has had such a profound impact on my working life that to this day, it is a part of my daily practice. I have the GTD apps on my phones and tablets, and it is a default webpage I load automatically in my browser. The greatest fear we have when we're dealing with so many projects or issues or people is that item that we forget because our brain is maxed out with everything else that is flying at us. We need to get it out of our heads and into a trusted system so we can function clearly – today's modern technology makes this easier. Plug for Toodledo.

I have read the typical time management books and if I hear the 'big rocks first' story one more time I'll hurl one of them at someone. What struck home with me in this book was the recognition of things constantly coming our way throughout the day and more than probably from our bosses, or customers who don't take kindly to being considered anything but a large rock. This book, therefore, deals with a very pragmatic and defined workflow for managing things we need to get done and understanding the priority. The workflow proffered here is

1. Collect
2. Process
3. Organise
4. Review.

The book is well written with a style that is easy to read and provides margin notes and images where appropriate. He tends to use bullet points and flowcharts which help illustrate important concepts. If you can take on-board just some of his concepts you'll notice the difference immediately.

I would highly recommend this book and process for managing the To-Dos in your life.

Jonatron says

I bought this book, and I read some of it. It sat on a shelf unfinished. I read some more. It sat in my car unfinished. I eventually made the decision to never finish it.

I think this is self-explanatory.

[Later...]

Now I'm reading 26 Reasons Not to Use GTD, and it does a good job of articulating the "ehhhh"ness that I felt while reading this.

[Even later...]

And if you think GTD's followers are a little cult-like (see, for instance, the comments on this review), check this out: When David Allen says in the acknowledgments "deepest thanks go to my spiritual coach, J-R", he's talking about a man named John-Roger "the Mystical Traveler", who believes he is a reincarnation of Jesus,

St. Francis of Assisi, and Abraham Lincoln. Allen is a minister in his *Movement of Spiritual Inner Awareness* church. Yup.

Bria says

If you find yourself turning a little moist and your pulse quickening with pleasure when you read words and phrases such as:

- High-performance workflow management
- Family commitments
- Priority factors
- The ability to be successful, relaxed, and in control during these fertile but turbulent times demands new ways of thinking and working
- key work tool
- assembly-line modality
- workforce
- values thinking
- desired results
- ups the ante in the game
- deal effectively with the complexity of life in the twenty-first century

as well as quotes around "colloquial" phrases, such as "ringing your bell" (which I think he uses incorrectly, at least according to MY understanding of a what a "bell" is and what it means to "ring" it)

then not only is this the book for you, this is also the society and era for you, because these things are inescapable and even more so in this book. If such terms instead have you thinking wistfully of the sweet, enveloping darkness to be found at the bottom of your nearest 300-foot drop onto rocky crags, then you have, like me, found yourself woefully living in the wrong universe. You want to be three branes over, where there is still all this awesome new technology and decentralization of art and science and society but nary a hard-charger to be found. In that universe, if someone wants to help others to be more productive, that someone wouldn't expect their readers to slog through a 400-page book that contains about 370 pages of enthusiastic self-congratulation on the startling effectiveness of the method outlined in the remaining 30 pages. Writers in that universe also don't get bored of their own choking newspeak every two paragraphs or so, needing to take a break for a witty and apropos quote, one-sentence summary or reminder of the previous two paragraphs that passed as ephemerally through their own mind as it will through that of the readers, or to just start a new section on either the same or a new topic, either one, it doesn't matter, no one will notice, it's just the same randomly-generated buzzwords bouncing off their eyeballs.

However, in that universe as well as our own, the general concept outlined in this book of turning yourself into an automaton of your own design is still valid. Only in that universe when someone wants to get more done in their life by exporting their brain to external resources, it's done matter-of-factly and with little fanfare, since that universe has also failed to create an entire race of creatures that can't figure out how to function without following explicitly outlined methodologies taught to them by highly paid professional consultants. People in that universe have external brains because it's obviously the thing to do, not because it'll make them more effective entrepreneurs, more successful businessmen, more highly admired community leaders not to mention better partners and parents. Half those things aren't taken seriously in this other universe and the other half are taken even less seriously but still done well. There, they learn how to be alive while they're being alive, by being alive, not from a book they read in middle age in desperation after having already failed miserably at living and this is the thing that'll finally get their shit together, I swear to high

heaven this is it, for real, everything's gonna be different from here on out. God I wish I was in that universe.

Emma Sea says

2.65 stars.

I've used a mutated version of this for years, but thought I'd try the original text. I was disappointed. I felt it gave equal weight to parts of GTD that are a cakewalk (emptying your mind onto a page) with parts that sound easy but are complex (deciding on next actions).

Also I thought the weekly/quarterly review needed more focus. Allen talks about the 20,000/50,000 foot view, but without enough detail on how to accomplish these.

I'd recommend reading through a summary instead of the whole book. There are people who explain Allen's system better than Allen.

Ruben says

I'm really glad my wife and I read this book together. It's already been very helpful in getting us to look at the reason so many things never get done on time or sometimes not at all. The book is well written. The writing is very clear, with lots of examples, though it's a bit dry in the middle and a little flowery on the ends. (That sounds like a description of a scone or something.) We're still working on getting our system set up (I mean filing cabinets for reference material) so I might need to add more to this in a month's time. I'll let you know then if we're getting more things done. As a matter of fact, that's one test to see whether things are still slipping through the cracks. Read, go!

Update: one month later, I can say that I do feel less stressed about things, and I'm getting things done like never before. Mind you, I'm not perfect, but I feel there's been a noticeable upswing in how aware I am of what needs to get done. Just having an organized filing cabinet and inbox and next actions list allows me to see at a glance the things that used to just float around my mind, fighting for attention. My wife and I look forward to our weekly review (Sunday nights at 7:30), when we get to go over every project and make sure that everything's on track. I've been implementing this system in my classroom, too, and that helps with the stacks and stacks of papers I collect as a teacher. I'd love to find some way to teach this to my high school students, who can never remember to do their homework or study for tests. Anyway, I highly recommend this book. Unless you already feel that your system is highly efficient, give it a shot.

Josh says

I have not had much success applying strategies from productivity gurus. I am referring to books like "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" by Steven Covey, and other books which share use top-down strategies to order our lives. There are two reasons why these have not worked for me. The first is technical: day-to-day life happens on the level of "stuff". The myriad of small tasks of varying importance and in multiple contexts hampers the effectiveness of top-down approaches. The second reason is a personal one. The entire mindset of these books is very unappealing to me. Books which simplify and systemize our entire lives, such as Covey's books, seem to suck the imagination and life right out of living. Peter Pan would barf and toss these books to his crocodile buddy.

Incredibly, one productivity book has managed to overcome my objections: David Allen's "Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity" has succeeded where other books failed. "Getting Things Done" (from now on I'll refer to it as GTD) has made quite a splash since its release in 2001. Its influence is already pervasive and some of the most useful blogs on the internet swear by it. I probably see it randomly mentioned every week. So for anyone who doesn't know much about it, I'd like to summarize the book and at the same time show how beneficial Allen's method has been for me.

First of all, GTD is not a top-down approach. Allen explains that "...most people are so embroiled in commitments on a day-to-day level that their ability to focus successfully on the larger horizon is seriously impaired. Consequently, a bottom-up approach is usually more effective." Allen is dead on. I already do plenty of big-picture thinking, and it really hasn't helped me deal with the nitty-gritty details of whatever messy projects and tasks are on my plate. Allen admits that a lot of times what is needed are a few tricks. GTD has equipped me to better deal with my responsibilities, and in some cases gave me some trick that helped make all the difference.

The second problem I've had with productivity books is more complex. I believe it is important to maintain a little bit of a child-like disposition in life. My impressions of the professional world are that it creates uniformity and kills creativity. It's very easy to figure out where my attitudes come from: I grew up watching Mary Poppins and Peter Pan, and Peter Pan was the first "big book" that I owned and read. I think I got that book out of my grandpa's library after his funeral. Both of these stories portray growing up as a very dangerous thing to do, and I've never stopped worrying that I will become old, dry, boring, and bored. But whether I like it or not, life happens, and responsibilities accumulate. And here is how "Getting Things Done" succeeds where others fail: without wasting time suggesting a cookie-cutter pattern for my life, it aids in conquering mundane tasks and responsibilities so that my energy can return to the activities that excite me. As I've implemented Allen's method, I've found myself able to mentally relax and in general am feeling a lot more creative again. That's pretty much fantastic!

Here is a quick summary of the GTD method. Allen describes a five-stage workflow: collecting anything that commands our attention, processing, organizing the results, reviewing the options, and taking action. Going through these steps for the first time is a huge project; Allen suggests taking several days to do this. It took me quite awhile to get all the papers and "open-loops" collected or written down, and several hours of work to organize them. Fortunately, Allen does plenty of hand-holding through this. If someone as absent minded and flighty as myself can do it, anyone can. Allen also includes chapters on developing and tracking projects (really excellent stuff) and deciding what to do next at any given moment. As a manual, it is very well written. It gives brief overviews of everything before going into greater detail. By the time you are implementing it, you already have a decent grasp of the material.

Allen sold me in the early chapters, so I dived in with both feet. It took awhile, but the results are wonderful. I have no loose unorganized papers anywhere. Before I did GTD, my mind felt like it was completely in knots. It's felt that way for years. Now that I don't carry the anxiety of lots of unidentified mental baggage and millions of unsorted papers, my mind feels relaxed and focused. GTD also helps me keep a clear picture of any tasks in front of me, and it's much easier to decide what to do next. Tackling a "next action" list feels a bit like a game. I hope to get one down to zero someday. I am more productive and am feeling more energetic. The method is also somewhat flexible: everyone's implementation will vary a bit. I use a clipboard with next-action divided by context, big wallets to hold file folders in place of a file cabinet, basic office supplies, a paper calendar, and four trays for "inbox", "next action / outbox", "data entry" (for business cards and such), and "waiting for". Very low tech, which is how I like it.

Only time will tell what effect all this will have on me. Increased responsibilities will be the real test of GTD's effectiveness. Although GTD will hold special appeal to workaholics and productivity worshippers, it is potentially beneficial to anyone who struggles to keep track of all the little tasks we need to get done. Check it out!

Melynda says

I'm a big geek, and here's proof (if you needed it). I learned about GTD from Merlin Mann's 43 Folders site, and became an instant convert. Because I love folders, lists, diagrams, flow charts, of course, but most of all because with GTD, you have to have a labeller. I love my labeller. I love making labels for my files, and admiring them in their serried ranks, all neat and labelly.

And I do actually seem to be getting more done, even when I factor in all the time I spend labelling.

Sarah Heffern says

This book should have been a 3,000-word article. It was full of useless details (e.g. listing the types of materials out of which an inbox might be made), redundant to the point of making me crazy, and overflowing with multi-step systems for this, that, and the other (seriously, keeping the 3- or 4- or 6-step filters straight would require flashcards).

While it had some useful tips, I can't imagine anyone having the free time to implement the system fully. Clearly, though, I am wrong in this, just google "getting things done" or "gtd" and check out the millions of results.

Letitia says

David Allen's smirking white male face on the cover of this book may convince that he's successful...but the man should reserve his smirk for one on one business dealings. The biggest issue with this book is, I couldn't get it done. *Getting Things Done* is written for a non-existent audience: a procrastinator with enough motivation to actually plow through Allen's dry instruction manual.
