



Why Getting Organized Usually Hasn't Worked



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PRODUCTIVITY PRINCIPLE #6

You can only feel good about what you're not doing, when you know what you're not doing.

(COMMENTARY)

Stress comes from unkept agreements with yourself. You can only relieve that stress by canceling the agreement, keeping the agreement, or negotiating it. But you can't renegotiate agreements with yourself you forgot you made. "Psychic RAM" has no sense of past or future, so things filed there push on you to be done all the time. They must be made conscious, and kept so, to alleviate the pressure.

TODAY'S QUOTES

"Get a purge for your brain. It will do better than for your stomach." - Michel Eyquem de Montaigne

"The palest ink is clearer than the fondest memory."
- Chinese saying

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

I had another BFO the other day (that's a Blinding Flash of the Obvious): one of the reasons most people are to some degree allergic to "getting organized" is the consistent lack of success they have experienced over the years with how they've approached the whole process of to-do lists.

The reason those lists have not worked is because they were an attempt to compress very different and relatively sophisticated and discrete functions into one event and context. If you try to make something too simple, it will make it seem even more complex and difficult. Yes, we've all been up against the wall from time to time of too many things screaming at us in our head, and we got temporary relief from "making a list." But we're in a very different and more multifaceted world than that band-aid can manage as an on-going procedure.

When most people sit down to write one of those lists, they are actually trying to combine at one time all five of the phases we have defined for mastering workflow: collect, process, organize, review, and do. They are simultaneously attempting to grab things out of their mind, decide what they mean, arrange them in some logical or meaningful fashion, jumping immediately to an evaluation of each against each other and deciding what they need to do "most importantly." One is usually rewarded with a short-term payoff of the crisis of confusion relieved, but left with still a vague sense of gnawing vulnerability to what's uncaptured, unprocessed, unorganized, unseen, and underestimated.

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WILDCARD

OK, take five minutes and grab something you can write fast with, and just dump everything that pops into your head that you have any attention on right now. Don't analyze or organize, just dump. Later you can figure out what, if anything, it means. If it's not worth the five minutes, write me and I'll send you your money back!

TIP

Keep two permanent plastic files in your briefcase or daily tote bag: "To Office" and "To Home". These are a portable version of your "Out" basket. When the next action on something you have processed is to route or file it when you are back at office or home, put it in those files. And get in the habit of emptying them as soon as you get to either of those workstations.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT (Continued from Pg.1)

We have discovered over many years of research and coaching that these phased aspects of workflow management are optimally done as separate activities. You need to collect everything on your mind first, little or big. Then you need to assess each individual particle of that inventory: is it actionable? If so, what's the outcome? What's the next action? You then need to organize all the results of that thinking into appropriate categories. At that point you can clearly review all your options of what to do, and make the best choices, given all the criteria for making those decisions (time, energy, context, priorities, etc.)

Managing yourself is simple, but it is not simplistic.

"Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler." - Albert Einstein