



Time Management System Overview

“Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity” by David Allen

Stuff

The beginning point is our stuff. Stuff is everything in our lives that we need to or want to deal with. In order to go into the system, all of this stuff needs to be captured and put into one of our inboxes.

Inboxes

Inboxes are collection points where stuff is gathered and held onto for later processing. Your email inbox is the best example of an inbox. In fact, it's such a great example, it's called an inbox. One hundred percent of our stuff has to go into an inbox.

Processing

Processing is the act of emptying an inbox – deciding what to do with each item in the inbox, until the inbox is completely empty. Processing takes time but if done correctly, it actually saves time.

Is It Actionable?

As we process our inboxes, we need to consider each item and ask ourselves, “What is it?” We need to understand what this thing is. Then we need to ask ourselves a second question: “Is it Actionable?” In other words, is action required of us? There are two answers to this question – yes and no. Let's go with ‘no’ first.

No

When stuff is not actionable, we have three options.

Option 1: Eliminate it by placing it in the trash or recycle bin. A best practice is to do so immediately, not putting the stuff back into the inbox or another stack which becomes another inbox. If something is trash, trash it and get it off your desk or out of your inbox so you don't ever have to touch it again. We all receive tons of stuff every week that should be immediately eliminated. If we don't, it just piles up around us and smothers us.

Option 2: Hold onto it for review at a later date, either by putting the item into a someday/maybe file or a tickler file. A common tickler file is a series of file folders set up by month. Each month,

the file is opened and reviewed. This allows you to place someday/maybe items by month so they will be reviewed at the appropriate time of year.

Option 3: Hold onto it in a reference file so that the item is easily retrievable when needed. This may be done using a combination of hard copy files and digital files.

Yes

Most of our stuff is actionable – we need to do something. If this is the case, we need to ask ourselves another question: “What is the next action?” Once we identify this, we can decide how to deal with it in our system. Just like there are 3 options when stuff is not actionable, there are 3 options when stuff is actionable.

Option 1: Just do it. The rule here is if it takes less than 2 minutes to do it, just do it – get it over with. Be done with it once and for all. The rationale here is simple. If you don’t do it when it’s top of mind, you are just placing the item back into your inbox, which requires you to go through the entire process again later. This simple act right here will make a huge difference if you stay committed.

Option 2: Delegate it. If we delegate something, we have an obligation to follow up and make sure the delegated item eventually gets done. Therefore, we need to keep track of things we’ve delegated so we can do just this. This is called a “Waiting For” list, file, or folder. It’s a bucket where we store delegated stuff. We need to periodically review the bucket to ensure that delegated items are not being neglected. This is a task in our system or an appointment in our calendar.

Option 3: Defer it. If stuff is actionable and you can’t do it in less than 2 minutes or delegate it, you must defer it to a later time. There are only two ways to defer something. One is to defer it to a specific date and time. If you choose to do this, you will add the item to your calendar. The calendar is another bucket. If you aren’t sure to what date and time to defer it, you will simply add it to a Next Action list. This is another bucket, full of next actions.

Next Actions

Next Actions may be categorized so they are more easily prioritized. The categorization we prefer is by location: office, home, car, gym, etc.

Project Plans

The last piece of the puzzle concerns projects. Some of our stuff involves projects which require on-going planning, multiple steps, and many next actions, sometimes simultaneously. To manage projects, a project file should be established to hold all project plans. This may be a paper file, a digital file, or both.

One of our next steps in our calendar or our Next Action list is to review project plans. During this time, we will identify next actions related to these projects. Next actions for projects are treated the same as all other next actions.

Your Next Steps

What is the next step for you? Are you going to use this tool? What specifically are you going to do with it? Take a moment right now and jot down your next steps.

Expect to struggle as you seek to implement this time-management system. It is not an easy process. There are many challenges with the implementation of new tools and changes in our lives, so don't be discouraged.

Feel free to contact us if you would like our assistance. We offer a web-based, on-demand Time-Management Workshop that may be of interest to you. Please visit www.mypmcteam.com for more information.

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