

## Getting Things Done – GTD

By Ian Darke

We've probably all felt overwhelmed at times by the number of things we have to do. Publishers juggle book projects, contacts to make and ideas to develop. Many of us have more than one job, plus church and ministry responsibilities. Each segment of our life seems to create its own tasks. How do we keep track of it all?

Some of us become so overwhelmed by the myriad tasks that we are paralyzed. Or, we waste time shuffling papers across our desk, achieving nothing.

There are many systems to help us get organized. David Allen's book, *Getting Things Done* or GTD, has resonated with thousands of people around the world, and sold more than 350,000 copies. It doesn't pretend to be a magic solution, and it's essentially glorified common sense. It's sufficiently flexible so you can use it on paper or with an electronic organizer. It may not appeal to all—Robert Andrews of *Wired* magazine dryly comments: "Depending on your politics, *Getting Things Done* is either a how-to for drones to perform harder and faster, or the book that will help you wipe out anxiety through streamlining your approach to work."

Before you implement the GTD system, first gather all the things you have to do into a "collection bucket." Include everything: immediate tasks, little things you've left undone for ages, projects you're working on, ones you'd love to do, articles you want to write, issues you want to investigate. Take time to think, search your memory and aspirations, and hunt out all the scraps of paper, diaries and notebooks that you've accumulated. The 'bucket' can be anything from a notebook to Microsoft Project.

One key principle of GTD is writing down everything you need to do. (It's also good psychology: sometimes we wake at night and think of an idea. If we write it down, then we can relax and get back to sleep.)

Returning to your piles of tasks, the next step is classifying them. First, decide if they are **Actionable**. These items include "write a new novel" or "buy a present for my mother-in-law." Non-actionable items are notes you've made of interesting facts which need to go into a Reference file. Ideas you'd like to explore someday can go into a 'Someday/maybe' ideas folder, to be reviewed on a free wet afternoon. At this stage you may find things to throw away too.

Now you're left with your pile of "Actionable" items. Allen suggests that for each task, we ask: "What is the next action?"

- Some tasks don't require one simple action, but a whole series of tasks: these are **Projects**. For each one, we ask "What is the successful outcome I'd like to see?" For example, for the Project, "Write a book on bioethics," a suitable outcome would be successful publication. Allen wisely advises us to note the next step or task, so that we always have some step we can take. For example, "Find out what books on the same subject are published."

- At the other extreme, some tasks are very small. If they take less than two minutes, then “Just Do It!” Some emails are better answered rapidly and filed or deleted, rather than left filling an Inbox.
- Some tasks you can delegate. You don’t want to forget about the task, so note somewhere to whom you delegated the task, and when they were due to complete it. These will then go into the **Waiting** group.
- Other items are matters to discuss with someone—your editor, a co-writer or your boss. Allen suggests creating a separate group for **Agendas**, because they depend on a suitable meeting time and place.
- Finally, the rest are tasks for a later date. Some of these tasks you can enter into your calendar now. Others go into a group marked ‘**Next Actions** - to do as soon as I can’.

The result if this mammoth sorting and classifying is that you should be left with:

- Actionable
- Projects
- Waiting
- Agendas
- Next Actions

The main aim is to move forward on your projects, at least in tiny steps, and ‘get things done’. Of course, no system is a guarantee of success, and there is no one right system. Allen writes, "Our productivity is directly proportional to our ability to relax; only when our minds are clear and our thoughts are organized can we achieve results and unleash our creative potential."

Nehemiah illustrates that planning is important. Moses demonstrates how to delegate. Scripture calls us to “pray about everything,” and not to worry about anything. The Spirit is a Spirit of order, and the Enemy is only too happy when we waste time instead of “getting things done”!

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