CS-M00 Research Methodology
Lecture 13: Time Management

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http://www.cs.swan.ac.uk/~csetzer/lectures/
researchmethodology/12/index.html

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Introduction

What is Time Management

Susan Ward, About.com Guide:

"Time management refers to the development of processes and tools that increase **efficiency** and **productivity**.

When we think of time management, however, we tend to think of **personal time management**, loosely defined as managing our time to **waste less time** on **doing the things we have to do** so we have **more time to do the things we want to do**.

Therefore, time management is often thought of or presented as a set of time management skills; the theory is that once we master the time management skills, we'll be more **organized**, **efficient**, and **happier**."

What is the Goal of Time Management

- Many time management systems make you do more all the tasks you have to do.
- Danger to become a **slave of your tasks**.
- So one needs to make sure when starting that the goal is right.
- One possible formulation of a **good goal**:
  - The goal is to have a time management system, which allows me to
    - achieve what is important for me,
    - while getting done what is necessary.

Challenges in Time Management

- Lots of books which make **big promises**.

- Example Priacta:
  - "TRO really works!
    21 days later, the typical TRO trainee reports 60% less stress from all sources combined and an extra 1.6 hours per day of productive time.
    (That's nearly 600 hours per year!
    What would you do with an extra 600 hours?)"
  - My experience:
    Although it looked good, I wasn't able to make it work.
  - This doesn't mean it is bad – it just didn't work yet for me.

What Time Management Systems Can Do

- They can help you get awareness how you are using your time.

  - Can be shocking!
- They can help you to do the most important tasks at times where you have highest energy.
- They can help split big tasks into manageable small tasks.
- Provide you with a system which shows gives you an overview over your tasks.
- Helps you to schedule tasks.
- . . ..

What Time Management Systems Can't Do

- It can't make you do what you have to do.

Tools and Techniques

- The tools and techniques can help you.
- However ultimately you have to
  - find a system which suits your personal needs,
  - do the practical work,
  - and face your inner demons.

Getting This Done

Getting Things Done (GTD) (TM)

David Allen

Getting Things Done (GTD)
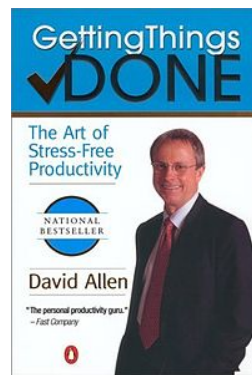
- Approach by David Allen.
- Principles:
  - Get all the tasks out of your head into a system.
  - Divide doing things into 5 stages.

5 Stages of Mastering Workflow

- **1. Collect.**
  - Collect tasks, data through email, conversations, mail, . . .
  - Use minimum of number of inboxes.
- **2. Process.**
  - Categorize into whether actionable
    (trash, someday maybe, reference, actionable)
  - If actionable decide on next action.
  - If it takes less than 2 minutes, do it now.
  - Otherwise: delegate it, or defer it.

5 Stages of Mastering Workflow

- **3. Organize**
  - Separate all the tasks into buckets
    - Project list
    - Next action list
    - Someday/maybe list,
    - Reference material.

5 Stages of Mastering Workflow

- **4. Review**
  - Daily short review.
  - Weekly review (**Crucial**).
  - Monly

5 Stages of Mastering Workflow

- **5. Do**
  - Four criteria for choosing next action:
    - Context.
    - Time available.
    - Energy available.
    - Priority.

Reception

- Wikipedia on Getting Things Done:
  - "In 2005, Wired called GTD "A new cult for the info age", describing the enthusiasm for this methodology among information technology and knowledge workers as a kind of cult following."
  - In 2007, Time Magazine called Getting Things Done the self-help business book of its time.

Michael Linenberger: Master your Workday Now!

Problems of GTD

- Task lists become too big.
  - Especially with automatic task lists.
- Too much focus on small unimportant tasks rather than big important.
  - Since you want to clear the task lists
- Requires a lot of discipline.
  - (Reported from memory, I hope it's correct):
    Even David Allen admits that his system from time to time breaks down and he had to restart again.
- I never managed to do the weekly reviews.

Linenberger Master Your Workday Now!

Michael Linenberger

Problem with "Important"
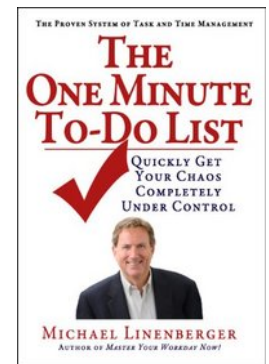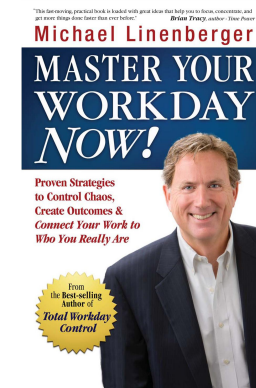
- Problem with classifying importance is:
  - You want to concentrate on important tasks.
  - However, there are different notions of importance.
    From Linenberger, One Minute Todo List:
    - "It might be important in a timely way, i.e., urgent.
    - It might be important for your career.
    - It might lead in the direction of one of your important goals."
    - It might mach one of your important values."
    - . . .
  - So everything is important in some sense.

Solution by Linenberger

- Instead classify tasks by only one criteria: urgency.

Urgency Zones

- **Critical Now.**
  Anything which is absolutely due today.
  Criterium: If you haven't done it, you will continue working overtime, until it's done.
  No more than 5.
- **Opportunity Done.**
  Tasks which are due within the **next 10 days.**
  No more than 20
- **Over the Horizon.**
  Tasks which can wait more than 10 days.
  You can forget about them for the moment, until they become due.

Additional Urgency Zone

- **Target Now**
  Items in Opportunity NOw, you would start now, if you find time and will be able to complete critical now.

Use of an Automated Todolist

- General principle:
  Calendar should only be for timed event, not for tasks.
- Use of **smart dates**:
  - **Start date** is most important date:
    The date when you want to start dealing with a task.
    Opportunity Now consists of all tasks with a start date within the next 10 days.
  - **Due date** is the date when you really need to do it.
    Due dates are only set, if there **is a deadline.** Often the due date is **before the deadline**, because you need time to complete the task.
  - **Deadline** is the actual date you need to hand something in.
    Written as part of the title of your task.
    Only deadlines you might enter into your calendar.

FRESH prioritization

- All tasks get a start date.
- Sort by start date in reverse order, so newest date come first.
- So old tasks vanish at the end of your task list.
- If you want to move tasks up the priority, adapt the start date.

Example Tasklist Linenberger (Toodledo)

My Experiences with Linenberger

- Seems to be a implementation/variation of GTD.
- Works initially very good.
- After a while task lists becomes too big.
- Seems to be a general problem of automated task lists:
  - They never forget tasks.

Mark Forster

Mark Forster

Mark Forster

Ideas of Mark Forster

- More intuitive approach.
- **Closed list.**
  - Don't have an unrestricted todo list – it becomes too big and overwhelms you.
- **Do it tomorrow principle**
  - Unless it is urgent, postpone tasks until tomorrow. Tomorrow you might realise that you don't need to do this task anymore.

Autofocus

- Various variants, not yet published.
- Various web pages describing it.
- Essentially
  - Have a book with your tasks
  - Add tasks at the end of your todo list.
  - Scan your task list, until an item stands out.
  - Look at an item you would think is more important than that one.
  - Continue until you have found the most important task.
  - Work on it, until you feel like that's enough.
  - Add it to the end of your list.

My Experience

- Autofocus seems to be promising.
  However there are lots of variations still coming up, so the system is not stable.
- Idea of the closed list is really good.
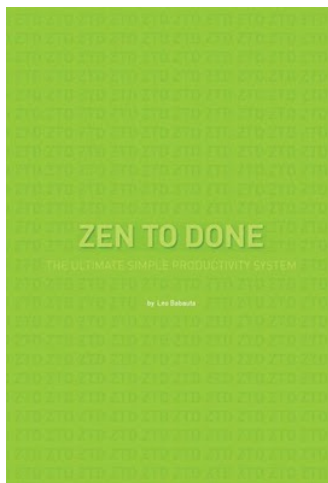
Leo Babauta: Zen to Done

Zen To Done

Leo Babauta

Key Ideas

- Essentially GTD.
- Criticism of GTD that it requires you to do a dramatic change at one time.
- Instead: build one new habit at a time.
  - The book lists 10 habits.
  - Implement one habit at a time for 30 days.
  - Then move on to the next habit.

Conclusion

- Using some system for managing tasks seems to be unavoidable.
- Several systems for managing tasks lists.
- None of them ideal.
- GTD, Linenberger, and Mark Forster require a high degre of discipline.
  - Once the discipline breaks down because of some emergency, the system breaks down.
- Maybe forming one habit at a time as in Zen To Done is a better approach.
- Ultimately everybody needs to find his/her own system.

Conclusion

- Maybe a common problem of all those approaches is an attempt to control yourself, your tasks, the world.
  - Any attempt to control the world, eventually will wear you down.
- If one instead relaxes and lets go of wanting to control the world, then one can use a task list as a tool.
  - Not as a system which dominates you.
  - But as a tool which helps you to make the next step in this life.

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