

Are you ever going to have the time and motivation for the projects you want to focus on? Or are you going to have to surrender yourself to the reality that daily life's pressures often get in the way of creating a productive, satisfying life?

Based on the famous productivity newsletter from management advisor David Allen, Ready For Anything covers a lot of ground and offers insight into the reasons for several problems about time and productivity management. Although the majority of this is a spin on the best-selling Getting Things Done by Allen, Ready For Anything still steps out to address a critical issue: How do you build time and energy for innovative, productive work in your life?

Chapter 1 - Having so much stuff on your mind can disrupt your imagination.

Unlike other things that don't require much of the brain – such as filling out paperwork, preparing a shopping list, or replying to a regular email – creative work takes a lot of "mental horsepower."

But why is it?

Firstly, the creative work is an act of mental equilibrium. At any given moment, a creative act needs you to constantly consider – and analyze – several distinct factors.

When a scriptwriter is in the middle of writing a screenplay, for instance, she has to deal with several different things. She wants to come up with a plausible plot and a coherent story. She will have to create powerful visual symbols for the emotional states of the characters-such as using heavy rains to symbolize sorrow. She'll have to make sure the screenplay doesn't need too many separate filming spots because it would raise the cost of production. And she would also need to do a lot of research on the background of her narrative, especially if her story is set in olden time, or something like that.

It takes a lot of mental work to balance all of these aspects at the same time. Furthermore, the effort relies on us getting some sort of internal "storage space." But, this space is in great demand for the majority of us.

All the knowledge that will be important in the short to medium term will be preserved in what we would call a kind of psychic RAM. The details we keep there varies from the subtotal of a bill you are computing to the fact you need to purchase milk. Importantly, this psychic RAM also relies on creative thinking.

Sadly, however, psychic RAM capabilities are minimal. Trying to store a lot of knowledge in mind at the same time will make your RAM become too loaded to handle any fresh concepts. What it means is that your creativity will struggle, of course.

If we can't be creative when our heads are full of boring data, notes, numbers, and so on, then it suggests that we need to come up with a way to clean our minds of that knowledge.

Chapter 2 - Don't store any of your exciting thoughts and projects in your mind to boost your creativity.

Storing so much knowledge in your psychic RAM will, as we have seen, disrupt your creativity. But there are other factors why you should quit attempting to put all the thoughts in your brain.

Firstly, if you don't write down a thought when it comes to you when you need it, it may very well be inaccessible.

This is because our psychic RAM is very small, so older information must be removed from it to make way for new information. Matter of fact, a more recent, even more, boring one might nudge the best thought you've ever had out of your RAM - like, "must buy milk."

In addition, the knowledge contained in your RAM is poorly structured, so when you need it you may find yourself unable to get a great idea back.

Imagine, for example, that you are studying for your finals, and a brilliant business idea comes up in your mind. When the tests are done, when you actually have an opportunity to explore the thought you do not have access to it because it is hidden under all the knowledge you required for the tests.

But you no longer rely on your psychic RAM by writing down your thoughts and those thoughts will be much easier to remember when you need them.

However, there is more to write down thoughts than to keep them safe: writing also lets us identify and analyze them too. There is a huge disparity between a thought and its practical implementation in the real world. When you initially come up with an idea – say, for a company – it's not generally quite straightforward, but just a huge pile of abstract thoughts and potential assumptions, such as "cut money" or "interns."

The act of writing down the thought in full sentences allows one to formulate it more clearly and lets one see any incorrect assumptions that we may have come to. For instance, the written

assertion "We will save 20 percent on our expenses by recruiting interns" is much easier to analyze than the embryonic thought that still resides in our head.

Chapter 3 - Being conscious of your work, your objectives, and your current responsibilities will help you to make smart choices about future jobs.

Imagine getting the chance that you've been hoping for: the opportunity to make a documentary. Then reality sets in – your plate is, sadly, very full of teaching Media Science at a college.

How can you know if you can fit in your schedule to make the film?

Simply being conscious of the activities you've agreed to will assist you with your decision. Setting down your existing roles and tasks – such as future courses and workshops that you have decided to teach – will help you see exactly how much time and resources you are currently invested in, and therefore if there is enough left over to devote to the film project.

In addition, once you are conscious of your obligations, you are in a position to accept the prospect of removing those projects, or delegating them to someone else so that you can make room for an exciting new endeavor in your life. You would also be able to delegate any of your classes to a skilled research student so you can do the film.

But even though you have written down all of your obligations, and are now well aware of them, you will always have to consider which tasks are more relevant than others. You need to get clarification on your job description and priorities to focus on in this manner. Then you will assess the value of the activities to a single point of reference.

In our situation, your work is a reasonable point of reference: How important is a certain task in comparison to your job description? If your job is a professor in Media Science, and the semester has just begun, teaching would obviously be closer to your job requirements than creating a video.

Your ambitions may be another point of reference: Is it your ultimate ambition to become a filmmaker? If so, maybe you should seriously think of leaving teaching and enjoying the opportunity that is before you.

Chapter 4 - The best plans prepare for challenges and disruptions before they happen.

Any project you undertake will entail its own range of challenges and problems, such as poor weather or an investor dropping out, and so on, regardless of the area of employment. Sometimes, however, planning for stuff that could go wrong is possible.

In fact, the ideal time to overcome future challenges is when a project is already in the planning phase, not when it is already underway. There are plenty of chances over this time to plan for anything that could go south.

Imagine, for instance, that you are planning a big garden event, and expect rain on the big day. In such a scenario, you'll have plenty of time to plan a tent for the crowd or come up with interesting indoor activities just to be safe. So your party is set to run smoothly, no matter the weather.

On the other side, if you hadn't used the preparation steps to cope with future issues, when a thunderstorm unexpectedly hits you, you'll have even fewer choices – you wouldn't have a tent in standby for example.

In addition, delays and interruptions are to be anticipated at every plan. Therefore, if your scheduling does not accommodate such interruptions, any unexpected occurrence would cause your project to run behind schedule.

Just think of a stage builder who knows his team will be able to build a dummy ship under regular circumstances in eight hours. If he sets this job on the very day of the debut performance, there will be no time reserve to fall back on if there is to be a sick call from a co-worker or the paint is not dry on time.

Apart from the fact that working in this way brings his staff under a lot of undue pressure, the designer risks not finishing his work in time for the premiere, which causes trouble for the theater and everyone who was involved.

What did we learn? A good timeline will tolerate such setbacks and will reduce major problems.

Chapter 5 - The best sort of organization will help you make stuff happen – and do creative things.

At first sight, it may appear that the principles and procedures of productivity-management are clearly not conducive to creative work-but they are nevertheless.

You can do more in less time if the job is perfectly organized. For instance, if you make a lot of to-do lists, but never really arrange the tasks properly, you'll end up distraught: just think about how you'll feel when faced with a desk plastered with different forms and papers!

Just to stay away from the seat, you're going to do whatever non-essential things you might – including replying to unimportant emails – but they're going to eat away at your time and resources, making you less efficient eventually.

Yet you won't feel frustrated simply by arranging your job into a structure that puts all your to-do activities in one place so you can keep a record of them. Rather, you'll be in charge and be able to devote time to each task without having to run away by completing various, less important things.

Also, the more planned you are, the more time you will have to be creative, and the more psychic RAM available.

Like the majority of the other tasks, creative works require a lot of time. So if your time is lost because of the stressful workplace practices, you will have less creative chances. Such bad habits often trigger the psychic RAM to fill up with non-essential knowledge, leaving little room for imagination in the mind.

To escape these challenges, you can complete certain tasks instantly which you are confident will not take more than two minutes to complete. Doing it liberates your mind and helps you to spend time on more important matters.

Say you're going to steal the Mona Lisa, for instance-a very creative job! If you're trying to plan such a robbery, so that it runs smoothly, first you're going to have to ensure you've answered some important emails and fed your puppy, then you're going to have to free up some psychic RAM for all that preparation!

Chapter 6 - Too much work being put into organizing your life will discourage you from doing stuff or becoming creative.

As we have shown it can be immensely helpful to get organized. However, it can be detrimental to control any part of your life down to the smallest part. While it's definitely important to be organized, it is also essential that you keep dynamic.

Why?

Firstly, rather than improving your productivity, an unnecessarily complex method will take all the energy and time you need for the actual task.

While you're focused on being organized, you're not concentrating on the actual task that is intended to benefit such an organization. Imagine, for example, that you intend to become more involved and balanced, and so create a very thorough strategy to incorporate into your tight schedule a certain amount of running and strength-building workouts.

If your regimen relies on the heart rate is carefully monitored and muscle mass rises, you will end up spending more time reviewing and managing your fitness schedule than exercising.

Secondly, you can become inflexible and hamper your creativity by attempting to closely regulate and maintain every part of your job and life.

If your management system is so complex and static, you can struggle to grab a good opportunity. For instance, you could end up refusing an invite to a convention that would be extremely helpful to your career, simply because you've agreed to a timetable that has no built-in flexibility to adapt to unforeseen events.

A static system could also destroy your creativity. For example, certain fiction writers are very careful about arranging the practical aspects of their writing. The outcome is that all of their books essentially stick to the same plot, with the only distinction being the specifics of the characters and locations – for example, perhaps one book is set in Paris, and the other in Prague.

Chapter 7 - Transform your long term targets into short-term action steps to achieve them.

Imagine an English professor making lots of fascinating characters and getting a brilliant idea for an entertaining plot. But the process of translating these concepts into a book seems way too daunting a challenge, given that there is only too little time: too many classes to be prepared, students to be taught, and assignments to be fixed.

Does it sound familiar?

There's literally no time slot big enough in our daily lives to fit a massive task. Writing the book, for example, would take a tremendous amount of time, because, during the average workday of

our teacher, several vital activities need to be handled immediately, such as listening to telephone calls from parents, supervising students, and, of course, teaching lessons.

And if there are several little periods of spare time during the day – between those activities, even when the working day is finished – there will definitely not be enough time to compose the next Great American Novel.

So how does one accomplish her target like our professor?

The answer is that one particular "action steps" can be conveniently slotted into one's timetable for the long-term target.

Our English teacher should break down her novel idea into concrete steps to get started, like choosing a theme, building a rough outline, or even writing only one page a day.

When she organizes her project and schedule into achievable steps, our teacher discovers that, unexpectedly, the task of writing her novel blends nice and snug into the slivers of spare time she has between teaching, testing, and preparing courses. And ultimately, completing both of those achievable tasks would help our teacher to complete the first draft of her magnum opus!

Chapter 8 - If a team doesn't get anything done, it will help to improve communication inside the team.

We have learned how to make our lives more productive so far. Now we'll see in this concluding section how productivity can be improved while acting as part of a group.

Normally, a team can be much more effective than an individual group of people. But teams often struggle to collaborate productively. That's when checking for communication issues will help.

This is because effective, consistent contact is important for active teamwork: a team must share information efficiently in order to organize its tasks effectively. For instance, members of the team can keep each other updated when they will be able to complete their assigned duties so the team can prepare ahead and administer new duties.

When one or two members of the team don't connect well, it may slow down the working speed for the whole team.

For example, if someone who works on a promotional campaign immediately wants input from his colleague about the musical tastes of the client to reach the negotiated deadline, but his

colleague takes numerous days to reply to his emails, the lack of contact would mean the team is not functioning as productively as possible.

One option for such a team is to educate the individuals on their individual responsibilities for communication.

Sometimes, finding connectivity issues within a team simply involves looking through each member's email inboxes. If a lot of emails are classified as "urgent" or "top priority," that can be interpreted as certain participants are attempting to get themselves noticed. Typically this is a backlash to their emails not getting an answer within a reasonable timetable.

The only way to solve this issue is to make it clear to every member of the team how important direct and timely contact is for the whole team. They must be encouraged to realize how necessary it is to exchange details on when a given task is to be completed, or if it can be even completed at all.

Ready for Anything: 52 Productivity Principles for Getting Things Done by David Allen Book Review

If you want your personal or work life to be more creative and fruitful than you have to start preparing yourself. This includes the use of strategies to open up the "psychic RAM," and the creation of mental flexibility to efficiently transfer the attention to whatever it is required at any moment.

Place someone in charge to get things done inside a team.

In a team, if the responsibility for a project is evenly divided among team members, none would believe like they are in charge. Therefore little is going to be done – not on schedule, at least. However, if you make sure only one team member remains responsible for the result of the whole team, there is a drastic rise in the likelihood that critical tasks will be acted upon.

Be orderly but flexible.

Try not to control every single part of your job, as this would not make you more efficient. It would also take too much of your valuable time and energy – resources are best spent elsewhere. You do need an operational strategy, of course, but at the same time, it can be flexible.

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