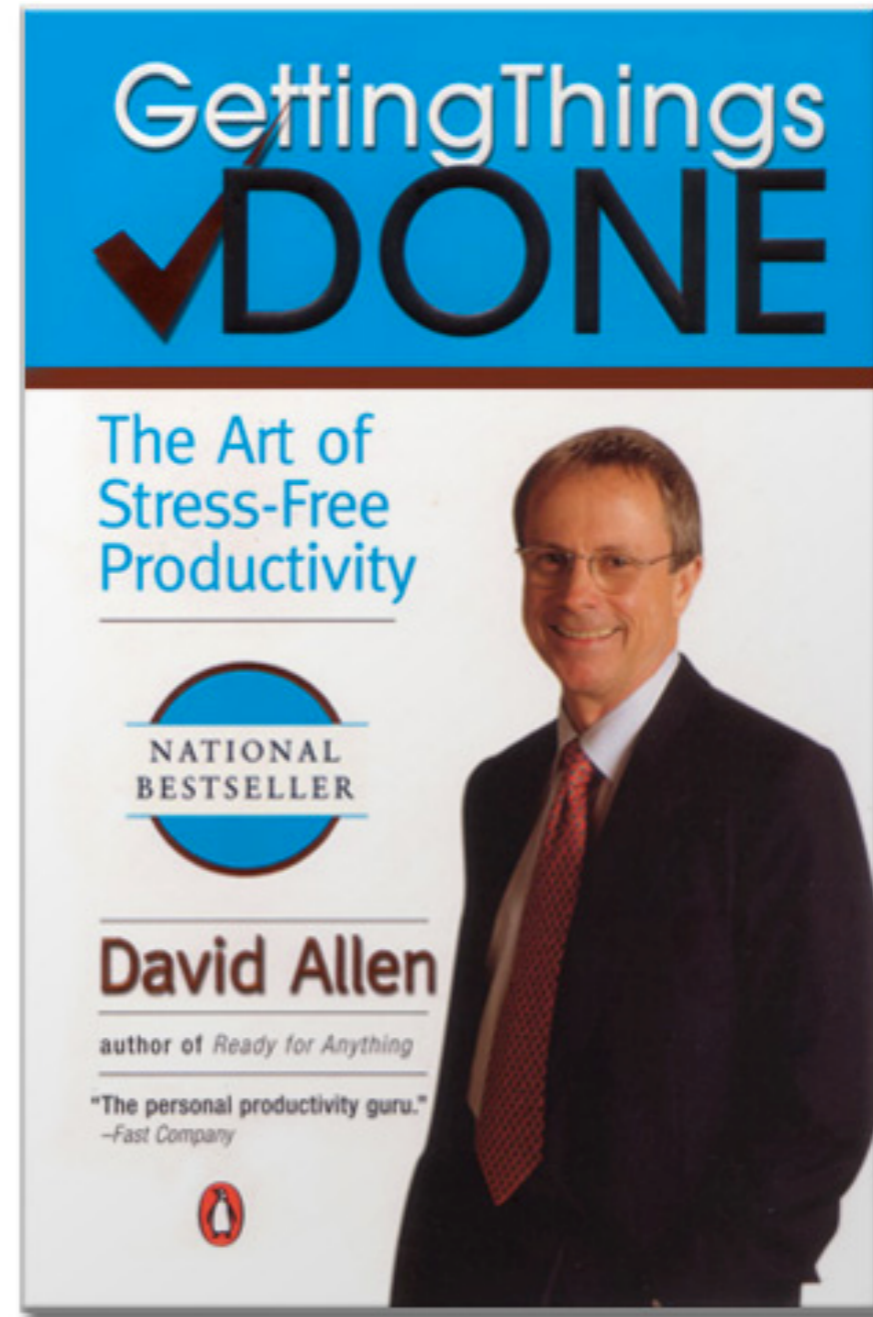


Getting Things Done

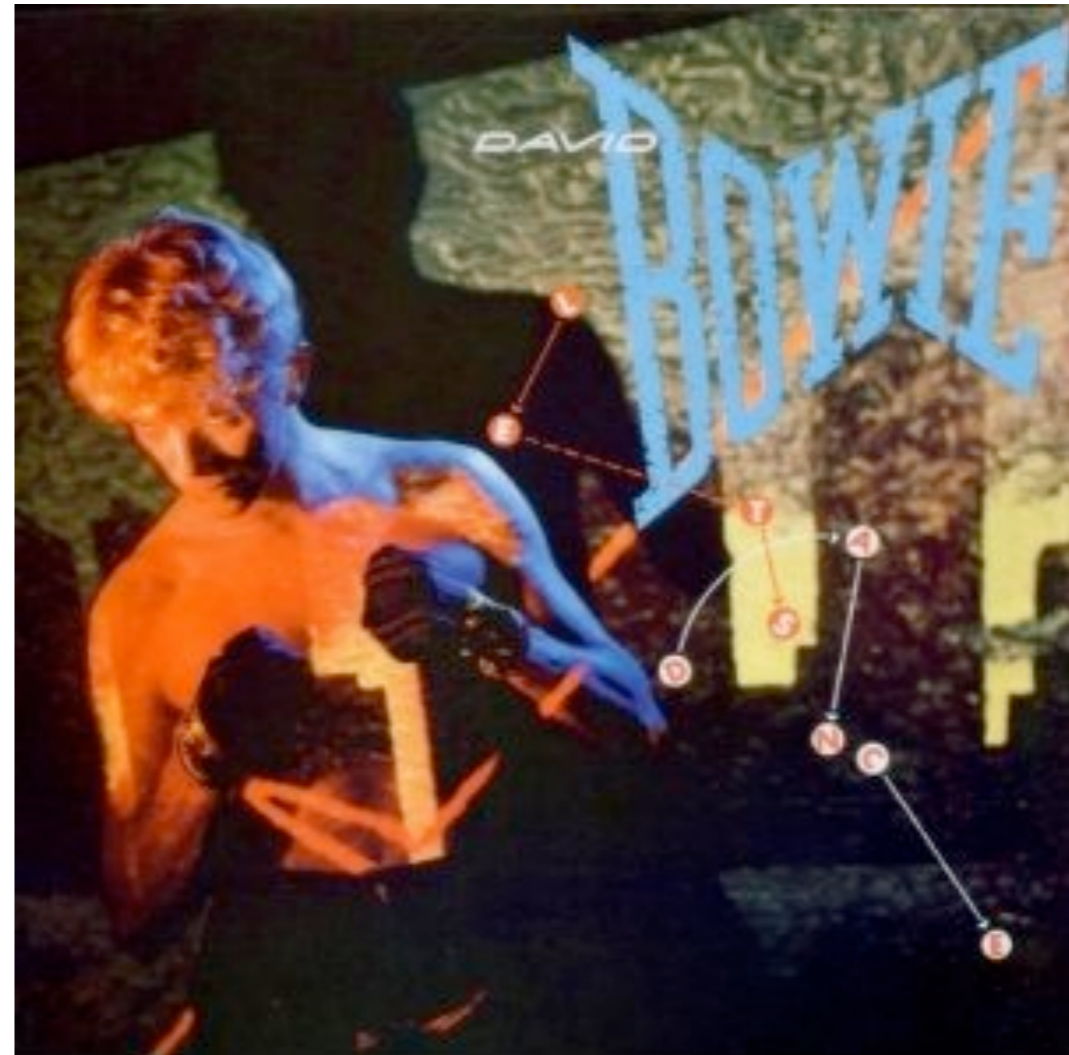
The book:

(It's good!)



I know when to go out
And when to stay in
Get things done

- David Bowie, Modern Love



**GTD isn't a
productivity
technique: it's a
meditation technique.**



**What do you want to
be doing now?**

What do you *really*
want to be doing now?

What's stopping you?

**Nagging Doubts.
Squirrels.**

Only Collect

Technique one: if a
thought crosses your
mind, **write it down.**

You want your mind focused on what's important right now, not worrying about what it might be forgetting. With a bit of practice, your brain gets sensitive to these distractions, you learn what should be written down. (Lots of things should!)

**You need a trusted
collection area outside
of your brain.**

Once you have this, you'll have a lot fewer nagging worries.

**What do you do once
you've written it down?**

This collection area is not a garbage dump. If you treat it that way, your brain won't trust it.

Technique two: go
through your collection
area regularly, and
triage it.

**Question 1: Do I want
to commit to acting on
this?**

This is a very important distinction to have in your mind: differentiate between things that you would like to have happen in an ideal world and things that you're committing to doing as soon as possible. I'll return later to how to decide between the two.

If it's not actionable:

- Trash?
- Someday/maybe?
- Reference?

Someday/maybe is where you put stuff that you would like to get around to eventually (or: that you're not sure you don't want to get around to eventually), but don't want to commit to right now.

Question 2: What's the next action?

This is an important concept, I'll come back to it. Inbox items turn into projects that split into multiple actions, or may themselves be actions that are part of a larger project.

Where does the action go?

- Do it! (If it takes less than 2 minutes.)
- Waiting list. (If you want to delegate it.)
- Calendar. (If you want to be reminded at a specific time.)
- Next action list. (To do as soon as you can.)

Components of your system:

- Collection areas.
- Someday/maybe file.
- Reference file.
- Waiting list.
- Calendar.
- Next action list.
- Project list.

Inbox Zero

The screenshot shows a Gmail interface for the user 'carton@sumologic.com'. At the top, there are navigation links for Mail, Calendar, Documents, Sites, Video, Groups, and More. The SUMO logo is on the left. The main content area shows an empty inbox with the message: "No new mail! Want to read updates from your favorite sites? Try [Google Reader](#)". The interface includes standard Gmail controls like Archive, Spam, Delete, Move to, Labels, and More. At the bottom, there is a storage status indicator showing "2% full" (Using 524 MB of your 25600 MB), copyright information for 2011 Google, and a link to "Last account activity: 3 minutes ago".

Your inbox is a collection area. It is not a next action list, it is not a weird mixture of next action and someday/maybe. Take the time to go through each inbox item, and make a decision: am I going to commit to acting on this soon? Do I know what action I will take?

Hierarchy

The *only* things that go
on your next action list
are single physical
steps.

Technique three: if it
takes multiple steps, no
matter how small,
make a project.

Example: Making a Dinner Reservation

Is this a next action or a project?

- **Make a dinner reservation.**

- Find restaurant phone number.
- Call for dinner reservation.

Admittedly, these days you can probably do this first step on your phone right before making the call.

- **Pick restaurant.**
- **Find restaurant phone number.**
- **Call for dinner reservation.**

- **Pick a date and time.**
- **Pick restaurant.**
- **Call for dinner reservation.**

You can imagine more possibilities; the right answer depends on the circumstance.

**These steps aren't all
next actions: only ones
you can do right now
are.**

And maybe none are, if you're waiting on either another person or a specific date to act. But if you don't know what you want to do or have happen next, then you haven't broken down the project enough.

Fear of Commitment

Now you have a next action list. And you've committed to do everything on it as soon as possible! But you can only do one thing at a given time.

Technique four: add
triggers to help you
select next actions.

I don't have a great name for this concept. But, the important thing is: whenever you're in a situation where you really do want to do one of your next actions, you'd better be reminded of that next action!

**One solution: contexts.
Shopping, phone,
computer, home, work.**

This is what the book recommends; it doesn't work for me.

**Another solution: go
over the next action list
at the start of the day.**

This is what I do; borrowed from Things and from the Pomodoro Technique. I'm not committing to do everything on the list of what I select for that day, or to not do things on that list, but that gives me a small list that I can look at frequently and where I won't worry if I don't ever look during the day at my next actions that aren't on that list. (Warning: the book frowns on this.)

Perspective

It's easy to get caught in
the details; sometimes,
you need to step back.

Technique five: once a week, do a **weekly review.**

Go over your lists:

- Projects.
- Next actions.
- Waiting.
- Calendar.
- Someday/Maybe.

Anything you're
forgetting? Any new
projects?

**This is what prevents
your someday/maybe
list from being a trash
can.**

**You'll review these lists
every week. So:**

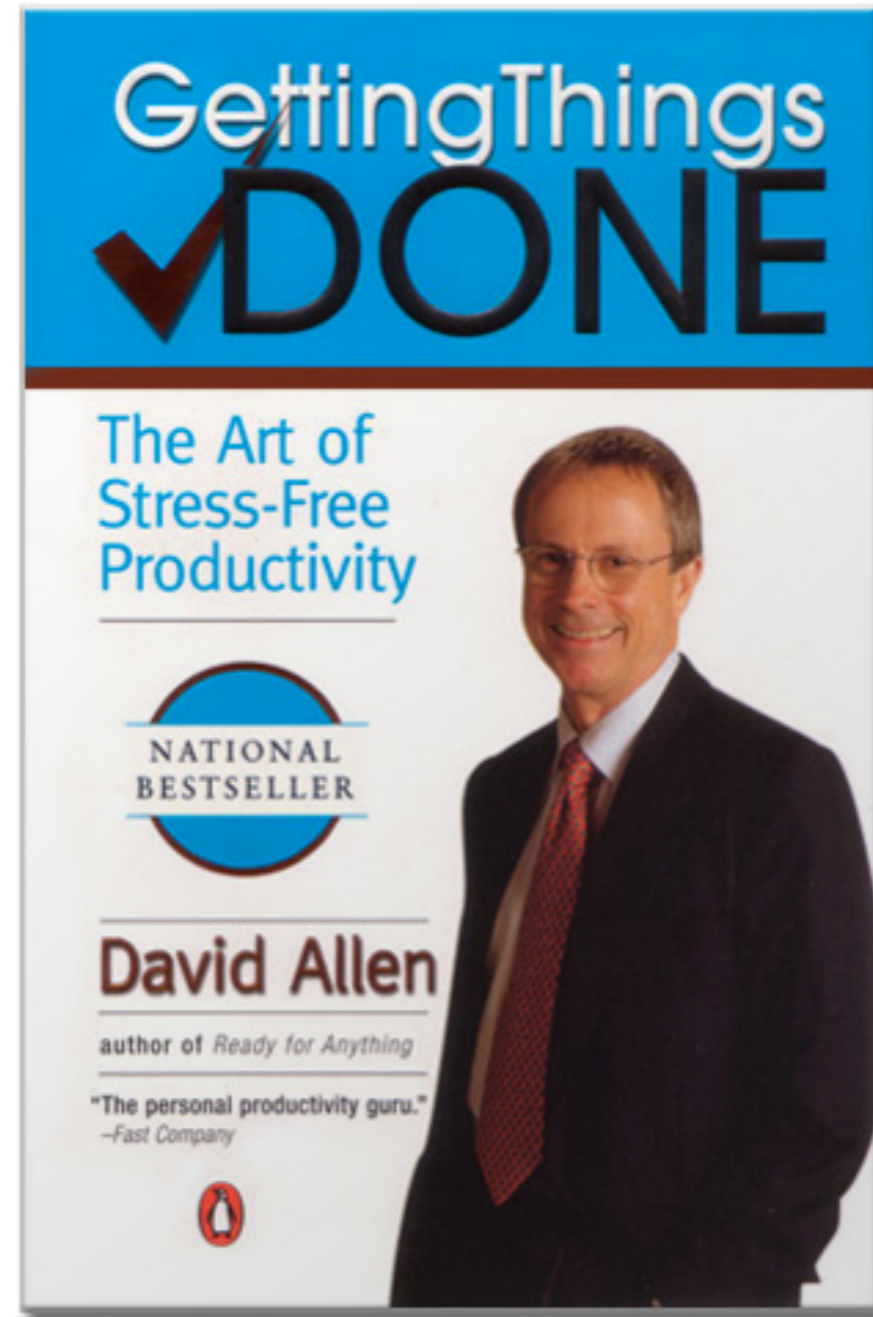
**If you won't do it in the
next week, it's not a
next action, it's
someday/maybe!**

Before I realized this, I had way too much stuff on my next action list that I wasn't actually treating like commitments. Now, if there's any doubt, off to someday/maybe it goes; and if something has been on my next action list for a few weeks, I ask myself what's going on in my brain.

**And make the decision
of whether to commit
away from the heat of
the moment.**

Give house maintenance example: it's amazing how long I procrastinated on various pieces of house maintenance, and how much better I felt once I committed to doing them and actually acted on that.

Again: read the
book:



Thoughts?