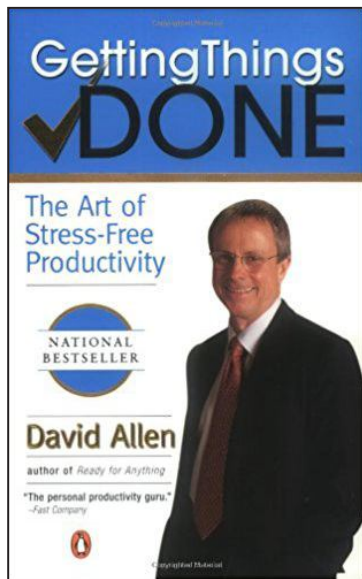


RETHINKING TIME MANAGEMENT (and finding inspiration in your own collection)

Are you a time management expert, or like many of us, struggle to prioritise, get started, finish things or plan ahead? Maybe, like Rhonda Cotsell at Ballarat Health Services Library, you have a time management book somewhere in your collection just waiting to be opened...



ABOVE – The book that helped ...
How to get things done. The art of stress-free productivity by David Allen
(2001) Camberwell, Victoria:
Penguin Group.



I have had in the back of the mind, for some time now, the thought of reading 'something' on time management (TM). There are things I want to accomplish professionally at work but important things get shunted to the bottom of the list in order for me to stay on top of my job. I thought it would help to refresh, with the possibility of learning something new and to check against what I was already doing.

But I never seemed to have time.

My selection process was to pick up a book on time management (TM) that I noticed on the returns trolley at work and open it at random. I found a line on how our minds can get obsessed with getting everything done at once – a line which resonated for its simple, blunt approach and which brought relief through having that fact openly acknowledged. Plus I had absolute faith in the quality of our collection due to the rigour of the colleagues who shaped it and who allowed this work to stay.

Initially I found it annoyingly repetitious, with an unwelcome lecturing style. The author constantly refers back to his own experiences as a teacher, and success with people who have followed his ideas. This was perhaps inevitable given that is based on a program that the author teaches and publishes in a variety of settings and formats. On the other hand the author really does have a lot of convincing experience both teaching, and with his subject.

I like the fact that what I was reading approached TM in terms of how we think about managing our time, rather than offering quick fix solutions for what to do. The importance of thinking versus immediately responding to issues as they happen is stressed. Why this is difficult to do is also examined.

The impossibility of doing everything was emphasised as a reality and not proof we are doing something wrong or not trying hard enough. That fear is real, sometimes subconsciously, and seeing it stated so baldly bought that fear for me to a place it could be evaluated for what it is.

Another shift was the author stating he defines as, and organises, his hours, to embrace both home and job simultaneously, not separately. With relief I could almost feel aspects of my thinking amalgamate and realign.

Out of curiosity I made a list of all the things I am currently dealing with at my library desk and in my home. I ended up with a much larger list than I expected but, oddly, one that did not warrant the niggling layer of anxiety I live with daily. The reality is a fully functioning, lively home and a workplace where things are in a state of constant flux, ever changing.

The book describes a simple three step process which can be applied to all situations requiring action either as they arise or while already in process:

Continues on p8...

- 1 The first is to clearly identify what the thing is to be done. This is not always straight forward. For example, now my problem is getting this response written to the word limit, in time. The real issue I realised, was something else.
- 2 Secondly, to decide what is your/my commitment to the issue. In this incidence, high.
- 3 The third step is to decide on the first step towards its resolution.

Applying that step to my list of current issues, both on my desk and at home – I realised there were only a few not already en-route to completion, but I had been fighting a losing battle with those few for too long.

IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES

I struggle with professional development activities. I struggle with the general untidiness of a large, messy garden I am creating. I struggle to find time to integrate my writer and librarian self. I am constantly anxious about a backlog of work in one aspect of my library role constantly interrupted by other tightly scheduled and non-negotiable weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual tasks.

ASSESSING COMMITMENT

Commitment to me means knowing clearly my non-negotiable values, my basic life priorities and being absolutely sure that they are mine and not things shaped to please others. My commitment for each of the above is high. In retrospect this seems obvious but what is obvious on reading is not always so obvious when busy living our lives.

PLANNING THE FIRST STEP

Professional development: The reality is I can't do much at work and that is my choice, but also it was proving difficult to do at home. However, I am committed so the first step was to find other ways of making it happen. After wasting two days at home doing anything but work on a huge and messy first draft of this response, I hit on the idea of doing it in a lakeside café meetup with a group of fellow writers who meet weekly for the sole purpose of writing. I can also do that when analysing articles and adding material to my ALIA PD.

My garden: It is going to look untidy for a long time yet but it's that or sacrifice its slow unfolding into what I envision it ultimately to be. My first step there was simply shifting my focus on what success was in this context – relaxation, exercise, and watching something unfolding under my labour.

The repository backlog: it will always be there, there is a constant influx of new material. I will always have to stop and work on other duties but that is a non-negotiable reality of my job. But also I need to remember that it is great material coming in and, to be honest, deep down, I like a challenge.

Writing as my profession: I have been on a wobbly track with two major projects that are moving far more slowly than I want but both require that I devote full-time hours to them and at the moment that is impossible. A first step (and ongoing) is practising my craft with other shorter writing opportunities like this one.

So, in conclusion I won't be able to finish reading this book (Identify task) before submitting this. But, (commitment) I have something to say already from what I have read and want to read more at a slower pace so (first step) I choose to explore thoroughly what I have learned and then continue reading at a longer and reflective pace.

Rhonda Cotsell AALIA (CP) Health
Librarian, Ballarat Health Services

EDITOR'S NOTE

If you struggle to find time to do PD let alone track it, the member centre at www.alia.org.au has a tool called "MyPD Tracking Tool" to help you record your PD hours online and it takes only a few minutes to complete. You might find your hours racking up quickly! Writing an article like this qualifies so don't forget to include all those bits and pieces you do, not just the events you might attend.