
**Every Busy
Businessperson I Know
Falls Into One Of Two
Categories:**

1) "I am so overwhelmed that it is too overwhelming to even think about it!" or,

2) "I was totally overwhelmed but now I have a better grip on things."

Which category are you in right now? I thought so. The fact is that today's work world requires some serious intervention when it comes to how much we can actually get done. These tips might help you intervene on your own behalf using the tools and technology you are comfortable with—and ultimately can help you move into the second category.

Are You Ready to Conquer Your Overwhelm?

7 Proven Strategies for Getting a Grip on EVERYTHING

By: Brenda Abdilla

1. Get your lists out of your head. This is perhaps one of the most controversial, yet important concepts of time management—and one that author David Allen calls, "Mastering Work Flow." The NY Times bestselling author of *Getting Things Done* (GTD), Allen explains that "our brains are not designed for storage." The highest and best use of our brain is for processing, and the brain cannot do its job if you are storing your endless list of "things to do" up there.

- **Keep everything outside of your head.** This means everything personal, professional, etc. If you want, challenge your brain by doing a Sudoku puzzle—but get into the habit of storing anything that requires ACTION on your part outside of your noggin.

- **Change the belief that writing things down is a sign of weakness.** Even if you have a great memory the to-do list in your head causes you stress because your brain will try to retain it all. This is why we wake up in the night and remember things we can do NOTHING about at the time—stress and misuse of the brain.

2. Create trusted capture points that suit your style. If you are going to take the advice above, you are going to need a variety of "capture points" for the to-dos, actions and thoughts that occur to you—when they occur to you. Capture points are reliable locations where you can easily and quickly jot down notes or your to-dos.

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- ***Get Lists Out of Your Head***
 - ***Create “Capture Points”***
 - ***Estimate Your Time***
 - ***Invest Time in Your Success***
 - ***Clear Your Inbox***
 - ***Schedule Your Weekly Download***
 - ***Bust the “To-Do” Thought***
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- **Put notepads (or whatever) in the key places where action items occur to you.** My points are: nightstand, car, office, and just outside of the shower (classic place for ideas and thoughts). I do use my i-Phone notes feature as well, but obviously not while sleeping or driving or showering. GTD author Allen advises that we need “as few capture points as possible but as many as it takes to get the job done.”

3. Start accurately estimating how much time things will take.

If you are feeling put-upon, overworked, underpaid and generally like your current program is physically unsustainable, it probably has more to do with you than any other single thing. That is not to say that it is your fault, but ultimately you have more control than you think you do.

- **Things take longer in reality than we think they do when we imagine them in our heads.** Look closely at your schedule.... When you schedule a meeting outside of the office do you even schedule enough time to make it back driving at the speed limit? Do you forget to allow time for predictable delays and interruptions (if they happen frequently, that makes them predictable)?

4. Invest time in setting yourself up for success. We all need time to organize, de-clutter, fix up and clean up our lives. Our work ethic in today’s world has been such that we feel we need to be in production mode 24/7. This is unattainable, and actually makes it worse; things fall through the cracks, and those things just cause more trouble and strife. And the impossible cycle continues. Taking time to re-invent and organize your systems is a great use of time and should be encouraged in companies, teams and families.

- **Become a filing *ninja*.** A filing system is useless if you don’t use it. There are entire classes taught about filing, and we cannot cover every tip here; just know that it is an important

File It!!!!

A PILE is not an ACTION LIST!!!!

element of time management since it governs how you handle both paper and things. A great place to start is 1-31 and A-Z. You will need 59 file folders and about 25 hanging file holders. Any item that you need which coincides with a date on your calendar goes in the corresponding date in a nearby drawer with 1-31. All other paper items go in the alpha file according to your system. As you pick up a piece of paper ask yourself what it is. If you decide you need to keep it, then the next step is to ask what you should call it and where you should store it. If the paper corresponds with something on your calendar, note that and then drop it into the slot with the corresponding day. If it a piece of paper you need to keep as a reference NOT related to a specific date decide what to call it and drop it into the alpha file under the first letter.

5. Take drastic measures with your in-box. Oh, the almighty in-box! Not one of us has “Answer tons of e-mails” as part of our job description, yet it is remarkable how much time we all spend doing just that. Our job is to be responsive—and there is little that requires more “response” than our e-mail inbox. The GTD people tell us that the average businessperson receives 228 e-mails per day. Wow! Even if you only get half or a third that many, if you don’t have a system for managing and deleting them, by the end of one week you can have 300-1,000 to-dos added to your list. In a month, that would be anywhere from 1,200-4,000. In a year... you get the idea. Overwhelm city!

- **Stop using your in-box as a storage area for e-mails you hope to get to later.** You have probably heard the 2-minute rule. If it can be done in 2 minutes or less, DO IT, otherwise it gets filed in a folder, added to a list or dragged to your calendar. *It cannot stay in your in-box.* And be careful about just printing things out and putting them in a pile. A pile is not an action list.

- **NO cherry-picking e-mails.** Do them as they come in and get out of the habit of picking out the important stuff and neglecting the rest.



***'When In Doubt.....
Throw It Out!!'***

***'Having 4,800
emails is a sign of
how disorganized
you are, not how
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are.'***

- **Get down to ZERO e-mails once per week.** Yes, this is the goal. The easiest way to do this is to sort your in-box by the sender's name and spend time deleting, deleting and deleting some more. When in doubt—throw it out! Some people have so much that they need to sort by date and must delete everything in a certain date range—like 2008, for example. Having 4,800 e-mails is a sign of how disorganized you are, not how important you are.

6. Schedule a weekly download for YOU! You need time each week to review the past week, your to-do list and your calendar as well as to plan your upcoming week, if any of this is going to work (and if you wish to keep things from falling through the cracks). The GTD people call this the weekly review. What is most important is that you spend time looking back, acknowledging what got done and scheduling what did not get done to a time when it can get done. This will build your confidence in yourself, which in turn will help conquer overwhelm in the future. Also, you will sleep better!

7. Bust yourself at the THOUGHT of a to-do. I saved the most simple, yet most difficult tip for last. Every to-do starts with a thought and this is where the real work needs to be done. Since our brains cannot differentiate the importance of the tasks we give ourselves, then it is important for us to learn to manage our thoughts. If you are sitting in a meeting and say to yourself, "The kids need to learn how to do chores around the house." then that becomes a to-do in your brain whether you want it to or not. Regardless of how busy you are and no matter whether the task should be a priority or not, your brain will store that thought and remind you of it randomly—like when you are at your child's music performance or at the grocery store. The build-up of this kind of running list is what contributes most to overwhelm. If you are more aware, you can pause right there and do one of three things: 1) do it immediately; 2) put it on a list or delegate it at that very moment; or 3) decide not to do it or that it is not realistic and cease to think about it from that point forward.

This awareness can be the key to getting much more done and to freeing up that beautiful brain space of yours for ideas, problem solving, and processing—like it was designed to do! ~



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