



Read2lead

Getting Things Done by David Allen

Book Summary:

Stressed by your job? Overwhelmed by personal commitments? Just too many things on your mind? Start by writing all of it down, recommends management consultant David Allen in *Getting Things Done*, his “practical manual” for unlocking productivity without the stress. To unburden your mind and better manage your horizons, Allen recommends his Five Steps of Mastering Workflow: capturing, clarifying, organizing, reflecting, and engaging. These steps, according to Allen, are perfect for netting everything we care about, ranging from our vision for life to our most prosaic concerns. Next, Allen introduces his Five Phases of Project Planning, a vertical management scheme to informally and naturally engage with projects we previously captured and clarified.

Having introduced both these models in Part 1 of his book, Allen proceeds in Part 2 to provide tactics and techniques to make them real. Capturing, according to Allen, can be the most difficult part, both in terms of time and emotion, as readers confront and list all their open-loops. Though the next steps may seem less demanding, they nevertheless require discipline to consistently execute. According to Allen, however, his unique bottom-up approach—focusing on current actions before long-term goals—means his guide is both flexible and modular. *Getting Things Done*, he claims, does not require a total, unrealistic personal transformation unlike other self-improvement strategies. Nevertheless, Part 3, Allen’s concluding section, does make clear that, with enough practice, his approach can allow us to realize even our wildest dreams.

Suggested Questions for Moderators:

1. Prior to reading this book, what techniques or procedures were you using, if any, to stay on top of your day-to-day? How well did they work, and how did they relate, or not, to the principles of this book?
2. An underlying assumption for Allen’s book is that work is increasingly edgeless. Knowledge workers, he claims, don’t produce discrete products, so much as engage in never finished, all-the-time activities including the amorphous concept of “management.” Do our captains and lieutenants produce discrete products? Does a company commander’s professional life inevitably seep into his or her personal life? Do Allen’s assumptions about the new nature of work apply to junior officers’ work?
 - a. *Encourage participants to consider how this book uniquely applies to the military population. For reference in what finding the edge in an edgeless world might look like, consider this [Army leaders directive of no work texts before 5 AM or after 6 PM](#).*
3. Are there any mentors or leaders you’ve worked for that had “[minds like water](#),” seemingly able to absorb all challenges with grace and success? What work principles did they apply to

stay on top of their professional and personal lives? How does their style relate to this book's principles?

4. How do you think Allen's Workflow Management and Project Planning Models reconcile with Army-centric planning? Do you think these systems of thought are compatible with Troop Leading Procedures and the Military Decision Making Process?
 - a. *Encourage participants to recall the seven-step [Military Decision Making Process](#): Receipt of Mission; Mission Analysis; Course of Action (COA) Development; COA Analysis; COA Comparison; COA Approval; and Orders Production, Dissemination, and Transition.*
 - b. *Encourage participants to recall the eight steps of the [Troop Leading Procedures](#): Receive the Mission, Issue a Warning Order, Make a Tentative Plan, Initiate Movement, Conduct Reconnaissance, Complete the Plan, Issue the Complete Order, and Supervise and Refine.*
5. Allen deliberately encourages readers to start small, as opposed to what he refers to as the "bigger view," when it comes to productively orienting their lives. Do you agree with his approach, especially considering it contradicts the common-sense approach to, as one self-help expert recommends, [Start with Why?](#)
6. Consider Allen's Workflow Diagram. Is it adequate for Army or junior officer purposes? If not, how would you modify it to better reflect the needs of the profession of arms?
7. In terms of the Five Steps of Measuring Workflow, what do you believe is your greatest strength? Your greatest weakness? After reading Allen's book, what more would you like to learn to improve your horizon and project clarifying process?
8. One of Allen's major assumptions is that, while readers can work remotely, they'll need an enduring home base for keeping their life productive. While maintaining this system in garrison may be straightforward, how would you maintain it for a week or a month-long field problem?
 - a. *Encourage readers to think about how the ubiquitous green notebook could be used as a portable home base, both in the field and in garrison.*
9. Throughout the book, Allen references the diverse people from all walks of life he has mentored to get their problems and projects in order. While junior officers are just as diverse, can you articulate any common problems, professional or otherwise, you've observed that figuratively or literally clutter their workspaces?
 - a. *Encourage participants to think about commonalities shared by junior officers. It's a young population just emerging from college and, regardless of commissioning source, taking a big first step into the professional workspace. Do they have problems with [drugs or alcohol](#)? Do they have problems with finance or relationship problems?*

Follow-on Reading and Resources:

- [The Art of Stress-Free Productivity: David Allen at TEDxClaremontColleges](#)
- [Article](#) on organizing your Greenbook; [Video](#) on organizing your Greenbook
- ["GTD and Teams"](#)

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