

## Q&A: David Allen's Path to Bliss

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David Allen rewrote the book on personal-productivity tips when he published *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity* in 2001. He started from the simple realization that the boundaries between the personal and the professional have blurred inextricably—organizing your kid's Girl Scout cookie sale can be as stressful as writing a strategic plan for your company. Allen's response is a technique for gaining "relaxed control" over life's many responsibilities. Today his approach commands a loyal following that can be described—for better or worse—as cult-like. BNET contributor Robert Landon spoke with Allen to find out why so many people think he's found the path to true happiness.

### What's so special about GTD?

I encourage people to give respect to everything: the little stuff, the big stuff, personal, professional, relationships, whatever. If your cars tires are starting to go bald, it may not seem like a big deal. But if you get distracted and don't take care of it, you may end up with a flat on your way to a big sales meeting. The little stuff has a way of coming back to bite you in a big way.

### You say that there's no such thing as "time management." What does that mean?

You can't manage time. But you can manage yourself over some block of time. Many executives don't want to admit that they can't manage themselves. [Laughs.] GTD is about getting rid of mental residue, not about going faster.

### Where do you see resistance to your method in your clients?

There's often a macho resistance to the idea of externalized systems. Some people want to believe that they can hold everything in their head.

## **Are more productive people happier people—or is it the other way around?**

That's an interesting question, but I'd change the terms a bit. Happiness is ephemeral. But what about satisfaction? You're most satisfied when you accomplish what you tell yourself you wanted to accomplish; when you honor the agreements you've made with yourself. Yet many people are addicted to a certain amount of tension. There's the same resistance to cleaning your head as there is to cleaning the trunk of your car.

## **Okay, say I'm sitting at my desk, freaking out about all the things I have to do, and all the things I've forgotten to do. How should I spend the next 10 minutes?**

First, check the "hard landscape"—your time-specific commitments. Do you have a meeting on your calendar that you can't miss? Then do an emergency scan. Is there anything urgent on your lists or in your inbox that you need to take care of right away? If not, you can do a "core dump"—write down everything that's bugging you: hiring an assistant, planning your tropical vacation, summer camp for the kids. And of course you can go online and buy my book, *Getting Things Done*. [Laughs.]