

Top-Down Productivity

By Robert Landon

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In the six years since David Allen's *Getting Things Done* hit bookshelves, his personal-management program has developed a following throughout corporate America. As more and more CEOs embrace Allen's "Getting Things Done" (GTD) program, companies are tailoring it to work for teams as well as individuals. We spoke with three senior managers to find out how they apply GTD in the workplace.

Making GTD a Team Sport

Who:

Steve Kowalski, Director of Learning & Development

Where:

Genentech

When:

Started GTD in 2002

Tools:

Loose-leaf binder, napkins and the backs of envelopes, Oracle's calendar software

Tip:

Create email folders that match the physical folders in your GTD filing system.

As director of learning and development in Genentech's HR department, Kowalski leads an initiative to bring GTD training to anyone at the company who might be interested, regardless of level or function.

Genentech's GTD training comes in three flavors: Anyone can receive a one-day workshop taught by a coach from the David Allen Company, with an optional one-on-one follow-up session. Higher-level managers can also request a more in-depth implementation for both themselves and their administrative assistant. Finally, a few business units, including Kowalski's own, have conducted team-wide implementations where everyone in the group commits to the training.

Kowalski reports that team-wide productivity has risen as his workers have become comfortable with the system. Having a common language helps them hold each other accountable. "If someone isn't meeting deadlines, you might say, 'Are you doing your weekly review? Are you using your folders or just working off the hundreds of emails in your inbox?'" he says. "Each person is getting personal attention, and that influences the group dynamic."

Tracking All the Balls in the Air

Who:

Peter Gallant, CEO

Where:

Pathogen Detection Systems

When:

Started GTD in 2004

Tools:

Outlook synched to a Palm-based Treo smart phone, Chapura KeySuite software. Currently beta-testing Netcentrics GTD Outlook Add-In.

Tip:

Track the progress of tasks you have delegated in Microsoft Outlook.

A self-taught GTDer, Gallant has been running both his personal life and his Kingston, Ontario-based biomedical startup according to GTD principles for more than two years. At Pathogen Detection Systems, Gallant has made GTD central to the way he manages his direct reports. "I track everything that I delegate," he says. "If I send an email, a copy of that email is automatically attached to a Task in Microsoft Outlook, assigned to a 'Delegated' category, and filed under that person's name." That enables Gallant to produce a list of every item he has delegated to any of his direct reports with a single mouse click, and this list becomes part of his weekly management meetings. "People quickly figure out that shouldn't drop the ball," he says, "because I track all of the balls."

At the same time, Gallant says GTD helps him manage himself as a manager. "By making sure that I deal with issues efficiently when they first come to my attention, he says, "I avoid sitting on something until the last minute. That means I'm less also likely to create an instant emergency for whomever I delegate to complete a task."

Personal Productivity Junkie Finds His Match

Who:

Marc Orchant, Vice President for Marketing

Where:

Foldera Inc.

When:

started GTD in 2001

Tools:

NoteTaker Wallet (pocket-sized notepad available from the David Allen Company), hardbound journal, Palm Treo 700p, Microsoft OneNote, BareBones software Yojimbo, Mindjet MindManager

Tip:

Don't get so caught up in fiddling with your choice of GTD tools that you lose sight of actually accomplishing tasks.

On his first day on the job at VanDyke Software, a New Mexico-based network security company, Orchant found nothing on his desk except a phone book and a copy of David Allen's Getting Things Done. His new boss, CEO Jeff Van Dyke, had recently embraced GTD and decided to make it available to all his employees. No one was forced to adopt the program, but GTD methods influenced the company approach to project management. "We never went into a meeting without what David Allen calls a 'statement of wild success,' which is an idea of what, in the best of all worlds, would be the most positive outcome," Orchant says. "We made it part of the agenda: 'For this meeting, wild success would be to nail down the feature matrix of our next software release.'" Likewise, no meeting ever concluded without everyone writing down the next action they would take to move things forward.

A self-described "personal productivity junkie," Orchant dove into GTD immediately. "I was always stressed about everything," he says. "Worse, I was always worried that I was forgetting something I should be stressing about."

Orchant recently left VanDyke to become vice president of marketing at Foldera, Inc., a software company that is developing a new online organizational tool. Foldera's platform, now entering public beta testing, is "resonant with what GTD teaches," Orchant says, and has the potential to become a fundamental for GTD adherents like himself.