Take Control of Your Life and Work in 5 Easy Steps

How many times have you felt that there is too much of work to be done, but so less time? How many times have you missed appointments and deadlines, forgotten to-dos, missed wishing someone close on their birthday, or even worse, got reminded of your birthday when someone at work wished you? Well, the reason for most of these issues is the fact that we have too many things on our mind all the time.

Just imagine how your computer would respond when you have a whole bunch of heavyweight applications open? It slows down….and eventually crashes. This is exactly what happens with our mind too. We have so much going that it just stress us out and eventually the brain fails to trigger the right processes at the right time. That was exactly the way I felt until I came across what I'm about to share.

As product makers, we are constantly bombarded with requests at work.

1. Can you review this feature?

2. Remember that customer we visited last month? They have bumped into a major issue with our software and want to speak to you.

3. Are you available for a customer briefing next Wednesday?

4.   There is a quarterly review meeting with the CEO this afternoon and I need you to prepare for it and be available by 3pm
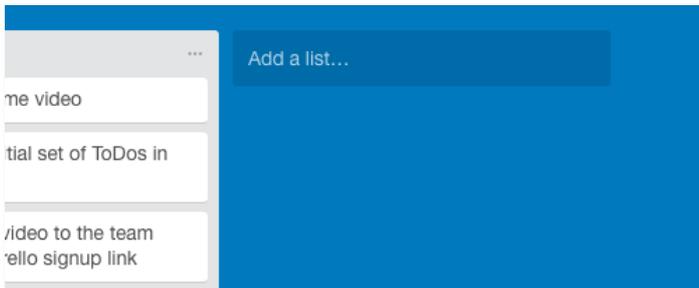
5 Stages of Processing Requests

The list goes on. So how can you get yourself uncluttered ASAP? Here is what you need to do. No matter what the request is, there are five stages of processing these requests:

1.   *Collect* everything that needs your attention

2.   *Process* each of these items and decide what to do about each of them

3.   *Organize* the results

4.   *Review* as options

5.   *Do* the task

I've read multiple versions of this workflow, but this one's from the book *Getting Things Done* by *David Allen*. So let's get down to putting them to action...

The Setup

First, let's make sure you are well equipped to *collect* every request or task that comes your way. You might've seen a tray or basket in office desks of the 1990s. I recommend you use the Trello App on your smartphone. If you don't use a smartphone, use a Moleskin notebook. I'm going to be use Trello as a tool for the remainder of this episode.

Let's start by setting the stage for Collecting everything that needs your attention. Now go ahead and create a board called To-Dos.

Create the following lists in your Trello board:

1.   Create a list called "Just In".

2.   Create a second list called "Projects"

3.   Create a third list called "Just Do It"

4.   Create a fourth list called "Delegate"

5.   Create a fifth list called "Deferred"

6.   Create a sixth list called "Someday / Maybe"

7.   Create a seventh list called "Reference"

Now every time you have a request, make sure you put that into this list. Just create a new card for every request. To begin with, get all the requests inside your head into this List. Literally dump them with as much detail possible. You will be reviewing this list end of

every day and the goal is to end the day with an empty list. How can you make this list empty, you may wonder. Listen on, I'll tell you how.

What we did so far is creating the necessary baskets that can handle all the requests that come your way so that your mind is clutter-free.

You've now dumped every single request into the Just In list. Now let's see what to do with these requests in the Just In List and how to go about processing them.

Processing the *Just In* List

(Block 15-20 minutes in your calendar Every Night)

End of every day, set aside 15-20 minutes to do the following exercise.

1. Go through each item in the list and understand what it is all about

2. Ask yourself one question - Does this need some action taken? Can I do something about this?

3. If the item in the *Just In* list can be completed immediately and takes only a few minutes to complete, move it to the *Just Do It* list

4. If the item in the *Just In* list needs action immediately, but cannot be completed in a few minutes, move it to *Projects*

5. If the item in the *Just In* list needs action and can be completed by someone else for you, then move it to the *Delegate* list and Assign it to someone and set a Due Date

6. If the item in the *Just In* list needs action but is not urgent enough, move it to the *Deferred* list and assign it a Due Date.

7. If the item in the *Just In* list does not need any action, but has useful information that you think is useful for sometime later, move it to *Reference* list

8. If the item in the *Just In* list does not need any action right now but something may be needed at a later point, move it to the *Someday / Maybe* list

9. If the item in the *Just In* list does not need any action and find it not useful, just delete it from the list

Now your Just In list must be empty. Yay! Congrats on your first victory! Most often we get bogged down by the requests we get because of the lack of clarity. This first step helps you do just that very thing - Get Clarity. Now you know which if the requests need action and which don't. You'd be surprised to see many of the requests being deleted and many being delegated. That's good.

Now let's look at how you manage the rest of the lists to actually get done. The first is the Just Do It list. There isn't much to say about this list actually. If you find an item on the Just Do It list, go ahead and get it done. I'm sure it's going to take only a few minutes to an hour to get that done.

Now let's look at how you can process the *Projects* list.

Processing the *Projects* List

(Block 15-20 minutes in your calendar Every Week)

Pick a day every week and go over the *Projects* list. Based on which requests are important, prioritize them in the list.

1.   Go through the top one in the list and break down the project into actions.

2.   You can do this by opening the item in your Trello list and creating a Check List (there is an option available in Trello to do this)

3.   For each item in the checklist, create an item in the Just Do It or Delegate lists, depending on whether you need to do or someone else can help complete it.

Monitor the Delegate list every week.

Every day, open the Just Do It list and blindly start to work on the items in the list. Your goal is to get these requests completed whenever you get the time.

Processing the *Deferred* List

You can set your Trello calendar through Power-ups in board settings and get your Deferred List as an iCal feed. Every week, look for items in your Deferred List that has crossed the Due Date and take appropriate action. You might end up changing the Due Date, Trashing it or move it to the *Someday / Maybe* list.
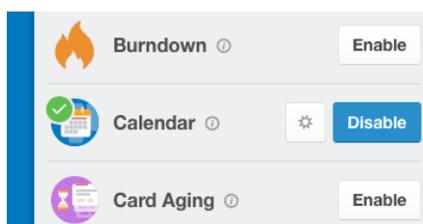
That's it! You should now start to see your days uncluttered, and more importantly feel in super control of yourself and your time!
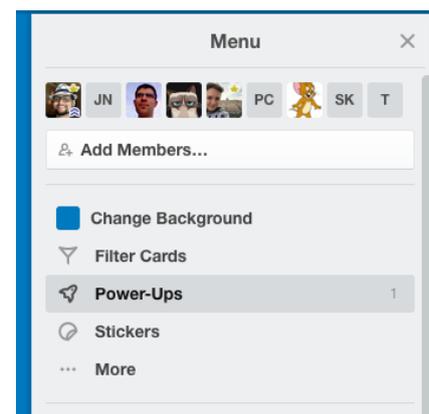
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