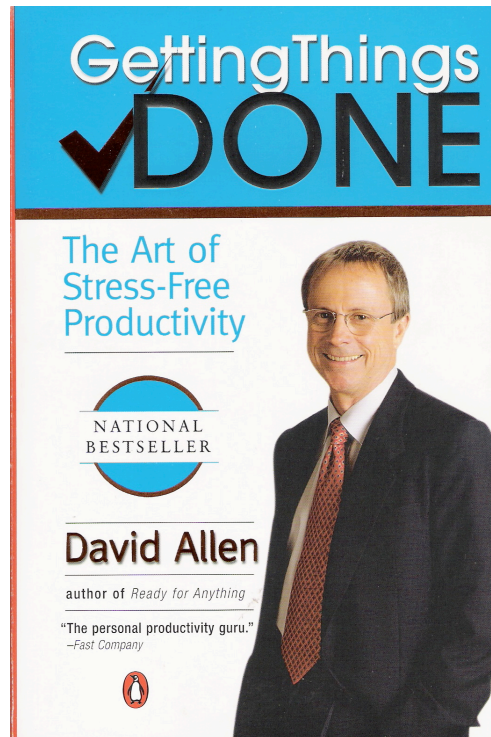

BOOK REVIEW

"Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity" by David Allen

Penguin Books: London 2001
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In my work as a leadership and personal coach, one of the most common issues that confronts people is that they commonly state that they are "time poor" and not surprisingly, are drowning in a sea of paperwork, things to do, and work overload. They typically feel overwhelmed. Some say things like they are "out of control." Simply put, they say things like, "How can I be more organised?" "How can I get on top of all my stuff?" "How can I find work/life balance?" Occasionally, they have been directed to seek help by their boss or manager.

So, where do we start? Dave Allen is an efficiency expert who has worked alongside countless people from top CEOs on down showing them simple principles of how to get organised. David Allen is widely recognized as the world's leading expert on personal and organizational productivity. His twenty-five-year pioneering research and coaching to corporate managers and CEOs of some of America's most prestigious corporations and institutions has

earned him *Forbes'* recognition as one of the top five executive coaches in the world and *Business 2.0* magazine's inclusion in their list of the "50 Who Matter Now." *Fast Company Magazine* has also called David "one of the world's most influential thinkers" in the arena of personal productivity, for his outstanding programs and writing on time and stress management, the power of aligned focus and vision, and his groundbreaking methodologies in management and executive peak performance. Not a bad eh?

Part of the problem with being organised is that we try to keep too many things "in our heads" and this stresses us. We have what I call "unfinished business" where we are caught up in our "stuff." In short, "This constant unproductive preoccupation with all the things we have to do is the single largest consumer of time and energy" (Kerry Gleeson) (page 16).

Dave Allen argues that the reason most organising systems haven't worked for most people is that they haven't yet transformed all the "stuff" they're trying to organise. As long as it's still "stuff," it's not controllable. This book recommends that the key to managing all of your "stuff" is managing your actions. Actions? Yes, actions. You see, many people have projects and things to do, but haven't determined the steps or actions that need to be done. "Things rarely get stuck because of lack of time. They get stuck because the doing of them has not been defined" (page 19).

Our mind is constantly wandering and it always manages to go to those areas that "should" be done or are not yet done. The first step therefore is to capture or collect all those things that need to be done as they occur to us (and get them out of our head). For this you'll need numbers of "collection points" such as the physical in-basket, paper-based lists, electronic note-taking devices, email and so on. Second step, empty the "collection points" regularly (e.g., once a week). Third, ask whether it is an action that we need to take and if the answer is "no" then bin it, put it into the "someday" file, reference it for when you need to retrieve it. If the answer is "yes" then either put it into a project list or if the action takes less than 2 minutes then do it, delegate it or defer it to do at a specific later time.

Of course there's much more to it than that brief overview. But you get the general idea.

Does it work? Well, I've tried it and it has a great deal of merit. It has certainly been of major assistance in the way I run my life. One of my friends has adopted it and now swears by it. Clients have reviewed the whole process and some say that it has "saved their lives."

Of all the books and procedures around on this topic of organisation, this has to be one of the best (if not the best) that I have come across. The book is any easy read. It's well set out punctuated with interesting quotes in the margins. To get the point across, there are also flow charts showing the process of how it's all done. There is also extra help on the Allen website.

In a world that is fast paced (and getting faster), we need all the help that we can get in making sense of our own world. This book will do just that. Read it and put what it says into operation. What have you got to lose?

[Dr Darryl Cross is a clinical and organisational psychologist as well as a credentialed executive and personal coach. He is also an author, international speaker and university lecturer. Dr Darryl assists people to find their strengths and reach their goals. Further information on Dr Darryl can be seen at www.DrDarryl.com]