



### White Paper

## The Two Gears of Getting Things Done® (GTD®) Adoption

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*This paper presents the concept of the "two gear of GTD adoption". This concept is part of my research into introducing the concepts of Getting Things Done. I also touch on methods for adopting GTD<sup>1</sup>.*

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<sup>1</sup> GTD is a systematic approach, developed by David Allen, which enables you to clear your mind, keep you focused and ensure that you can continually take the next action of the most important thing.

The approach is basically about following these four simply step:

1. Get everything out of your head.
2. Make decisions about actions required on stuff when it shows up not when it blows up.
3. Organize reminders of your projects and the next actions on them in appropriate categories, based on how and when you need to access them.
4. Keep your system current, complete and reviewed sufficiently to trust your intuitive choices about what you're doing and what you're not doing at any point in time.

## Gears

The "first gear" of GTD adoption is effectiveness and the "second gear" is doing it all stress free.

## GTD is not about speed, it is about momentum

The idea of the two gears of GTD adoption comes from the concept of converting energy into momentum.

Just as a manually geared car (i.e. stick shift) stalls if you try to take off in 2nd gear, so will GTD if you try stress free before you've mastered effectiveness.

You need to get some speed up before you can change to the 2nd gear. Changing gears too early will stall your progress; i.e. focusing on the finer details of GTD too early will kill your enthusiasm. Likewise, changing gears too late will break your engine, i.e. working all the effectiveness techniques and routines without learning the critical thinking will have you exhausted before you experience the truly profound benefits of mind like water.

## Effectiveness

Effectiveness follows the notion of performance equals potential less interference.

i.e. you're ability to perform well at any given task is directly related to your ability to focus. If you are distracted, externally or internally, your performance will be diminished.

When operating at less than 100% effectiveness, things in general not only take longer to do, but also often the long term, critical or really important things get overlooked.

The effectiveness "gear" relates to the tips and tricks in the GTD approach that will increase your performance.

## Stress Free

Stress Free is basically this... the confidence that what you choose to do at any given moment is the most appropriate thing you should be doing at that moment, and that everything else will be got to in time. i.e. there is no conflict or guilt at what you are doing or not doing at any stage of your day. Another part of the "stress free" aspect is the concept of "mind like water".

In karate there is an image that's used to define the position of perfect readiness: "mind like water." Imagine throwing a pebble into a still pond. How does the water respond? The answer is, totally appropriately to the force and mass of the input; then it returns to calm. It doesn't overreact or underreact. Anything that causes you to overreact or underreact can control you, and often does. Responding inappropriately to your e-mail, your staff, your projects, your unread magazines, your thoughts about what you need to do, your children, or your boss will lead to less effective results than you'd like. Most people give either more or less attention to things than they deserve, simply because they don't operate with a "mind like water."

-David Allen

### **Aren't these concept interrelated?**

Having just proposed "2 gears", I realised that those of you who have achieved stress free effectiveness will know that being truly 100% effective requires the stress free component also. The concepts are definitely interdependent.

However, for some people to go from 80% to 90% effectiveness could mean 30 minutes less time spent at work per day and make the difference in getting home to say good night to their kids. This is why I propose getting "effective" before worrying about "stress Free". These is another reason I recommend initially focusing on effectiveness, and that is because "GTD adoption causes stress".

### **GTD adoption causes stress**

The irony about GTD is that for some people, the early stages of GTD adoption causes stress. This group of people are relatively stress-free because they just don't pay attention to all the things they should or could be doing. They don't have guilt for not doing something because they choose not to think about what they are not doing.

In adopting GTD, one of the first things you do is to identify everything that has your attention. You are compelled to start thinking about all the things you could or should be doing. It is a bit like a rude awakening. This causes a great deal of stress because it takes some time to fully grasp how to manage all the stuff that you have been blissfully ignoring for so long.

This why I propose the "two gears of GTD".

### **How to use the 2 gear approach**

So how do you put the "2 gears of GTD adoption" in to practice?

Firstly, bring GTD in to your world; instead of bringing your world to GTD.

i.e. stopping your world, tossing aside your current organisational and time management techniques isn't realistic. Unless you are very unique, the world will keep moving as you take timeout to change your approach, therefore you need to take it handy and bring pieces of GTD in to your world over time.

Secondly, don't re-invent the wheel, well not initially. Trying to customise the ideas in GTD on day 1 is unrealistic it will take time to understand what parts of GTD work for you straight-up and what parts of GTD need to be tweaked given your specific circumstances and environment.

And now for the exact steps...

## **1st Gear - Effectiveness:**

### **Step 1 : Capture and Organise**

If you aren't the book reading type, get someone to help you do a mind sweep, understand how to capture, understand how to use the work-flow and show you how to organise your decisions into a list manager.

Note - A list manager is simply a group of lists. Don't get too fancy with your first list manager. I strongly recommend a simple spiral notepad with file tabs separating each list. Paper is very fast, very flexible and you already know how to use it.

### **Step 2: Do - Use your lists, capture and process your inputs using the workflow and get things done.**

Once again, if you aren't the book reading type, have someone guide you through testing your list contents against the workflow and help you understand what do with paper and other physical items.

### **Step 3: Reflect - Do a weekly review.**

This is really best done with help from someone else as it is a critical test of your grasp of the concepts of control.

Either way, the concept is presented in the book and widely explained in online material.

The weekly review will form a critical component of your approach over time; however in the short-term, the weekly review will help you understand what is and what isn't working.

## **2nd Gear - Stress Free:**

2nd gear will come over time if you are focused on capturing and processing 100% of the stuff that has your attention.

If you capture everything (and don't pile it), you will be forced to use the workflow to decide what is to be done. If you use the workflow for everything, you will be forced to create the trusted locations for the results of your thinking. Having the trusted location for everything that you should or could do completes the picture. Because if you don't trust where you are putting decisions, you won't make the decisions and if you know you won't make the decisions, you won't capture 100% and if you don't capture 100% you can't have "mind like water".

Perfecting 2nd gear takes time and is best achieved with external help, either from someone guiding you or by learning from other people's experiences through reading and participating in online mediums.