
HOW TO BE MORE **PRODUCTIVE IN 2021**

4 Things To STOP and START Doing To Increase Your Output and Reduce Your Stress





It's 4:55 p.m. and you're ending your workday.

You need to transition out of work and head out to pick up dinner for your family. As you take a minute to review your day, it occurs to you that you didn't finish a single key task you intended to finish when you started that morning. And yet, you feel completely exhausted. You think to yourself, "How could I not have done anything today? I feel like I've been running around all day. Ugh. I never have enough time."

How often does this happen to you? Sometimes? A lot of the time? Every day?

This productivity "let-down" at the end of the day is all too common-and it's depressing. You work furiously and yet don't feel like you did any REAL work at all. You wonder, "What did I spend my day doing?" It feels like a blur.

“Much of the stress people feel doesn’t come from having too much to do, it comes from not finishing what they’ve started.”

—David Allen, author of *Getting Things Done*



Always Busy. Never Productive.

Often, our response is to work longer hours and burn ourselves out. Or we might engage in the blame game. When it comes to justifying our productivity, the trifecta of blame includes:

1. *Stuff*—“I’m overwhelmed by my tasks, there’s just too much to do.”
2. *Time*—“There’s just not enough time in the day.”
3. *Others*—“If only my boss didn’t give me so much to do . . .”

What if I told you none of these are the REAL problem? What if I told you the real issue is you? What if I told your stress and overwhelm is not a result of the lack of time or volume of stuff, but rather how you manage it all?



Change Your Habits. Change Your Results.

I'm not saying it's all in your head. What I'm actually saying is that it's all in your habits. If you and I are going to succeed in this world, we have to find a way to manage all of the stuff in our lives.

Pay attention, I didn't say "do" all the stuff in our lives, I said manage. Having too much on your plate and not enough time is not a new challenge, it's not COVID-19 specific. Having conflicting priorities isn't a new thing either.

If you want to avoid this productivity let-down and, at 4:55pm, feel both exhausted AND productive, here are four things to stop doing and four things to start doing. I won't waste time on vague concepts, I'll be very specific and prescriptive about behaviors that will help you reduce stress and overwhelm.



STOP DOING: **LOOKING AT YOUR EMAIL FIRST THING.**

When you start your day looking at email, your ever-changing, ever-populating inbox becomes the lens through which you view the rest of your day.

Every new alert seems important and therefore overrides more strategic plans you likely made for the day.

1

START DOING: **LOOK AT YOUR CALENDAR AND LISTS FIRST.**

Take two to three minutes each morning to review your calendar. This is the stuff you've committed to accomplish and is the best data regarding how much time you have in which to do other work during the day.

For example, if you have meetings from 8 am to 3 pm, you only have a small window to accomplish any additional work.

After reviewing your calendar, look at your to-do lists. And that's it. Doing a quick review of your calendar and lists before your email increases your likelihood of doing the "right" stuff throughout the day. You'll look at incoming requests through the lens of the stuff you already deemed important.

STOP DOING: **DON'T PLAN TO DO TEN THINGS EVERY DAY.**

Most of us pretend that somehow, with six meetings, lunch, dozens of emails to plow through and driving the kids to school, we will find a way to accomplish ten key tasks. It's highly unlikely.

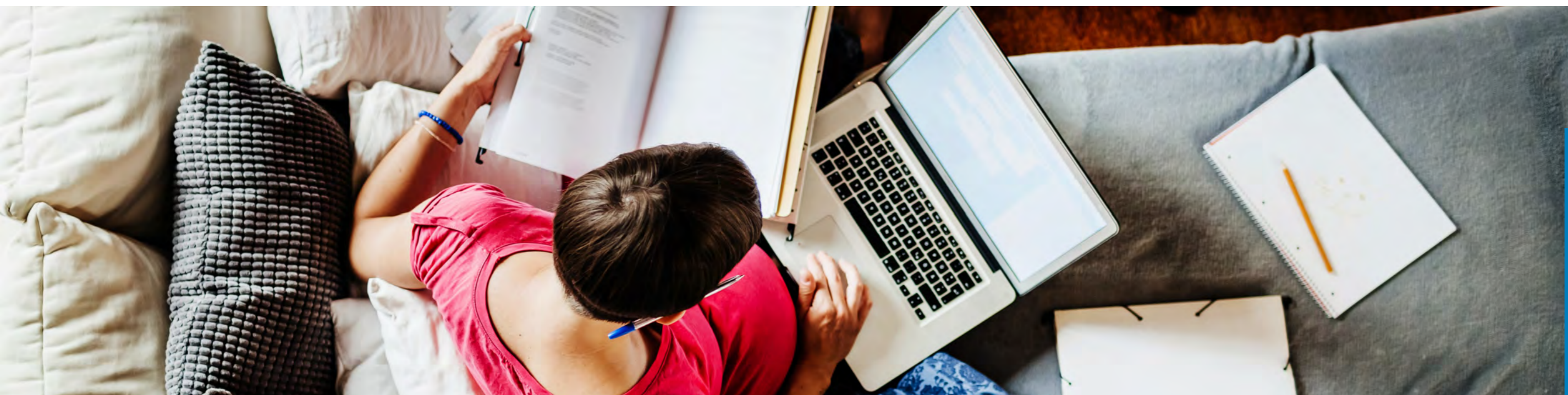
When we give ourselves unrealistic daily goals, we set ourselves up for failure and frustration.

2

START DOING: **PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THREE THINGS.**

I've found you can usually only accomplish three things well each day. And I'm not talking about mundane or routine tasks. I'm talking about three key items that will move important projects forward.

If you have extra time, great. But anything beyond three is simply dangerously ambitious.





STOP DOING:
STOP SAYING YES TO EVERYTHING.

Too often, we think the word “yes” comes with magical powers. We think that by agreeing to every task that comes our way, we’ll somehow be able to defy the odds and get it all done—but it’s an illusion.

Realize, there is always more that could be done than you can actually do. You need to stop saying “yes” and telling yourself you’ll figure out the details later.

Help your future self by not overloading your plate.

3

START DOING: TACTFULLY SAY NO OR RENEGOTIATE COMMITMENTS.

When someone makes a request, ask a few key questions so you fully understand what the request entails and the exact date it needs to be completed. If you can’t do it, either say, “I’m very sorry, but I will need to decline doing that right now so that I can focus on other key priorities.”

Or you can renegotiate the request in terms of how much is done or when it’s done, such as “I can’t commit to having that completed by Friday, but I could start now and have it done by the following Tuesday. Would that work?”

4

STOP DOING: **WORKING WHILE YOU PROCESS EMAILS AND PROCESSING EMAILS WHILE YOU WORK.**

This is one of the biggest contributors to why you can never reach the bottom of the endless pit that is your email inbox. The volume is less important than how you manage it.

How often do you start reading through your emails and then take a twenty-minute detour to address a project that popped up in one of the emails only to have to start reading your emails all over again? While you'll have to do that project sooner or later, doing it in the moment is inefficient.

START DOING: **WORK IN MODES FOR GREATER FOCUS AND EFFICIENCY.**

There are three key modes you need to work in throughout the day.

1. Define work—process your email inbox and other new inputs.
2. Defined work—work from calendars or lists.
3. Surprises—work that shows up unplanned.

Set aside time each day to do all three. And don't say that you don't have the time. You are already working in these modes, but you're likely doing them all at once, which is incredibly inefficient.

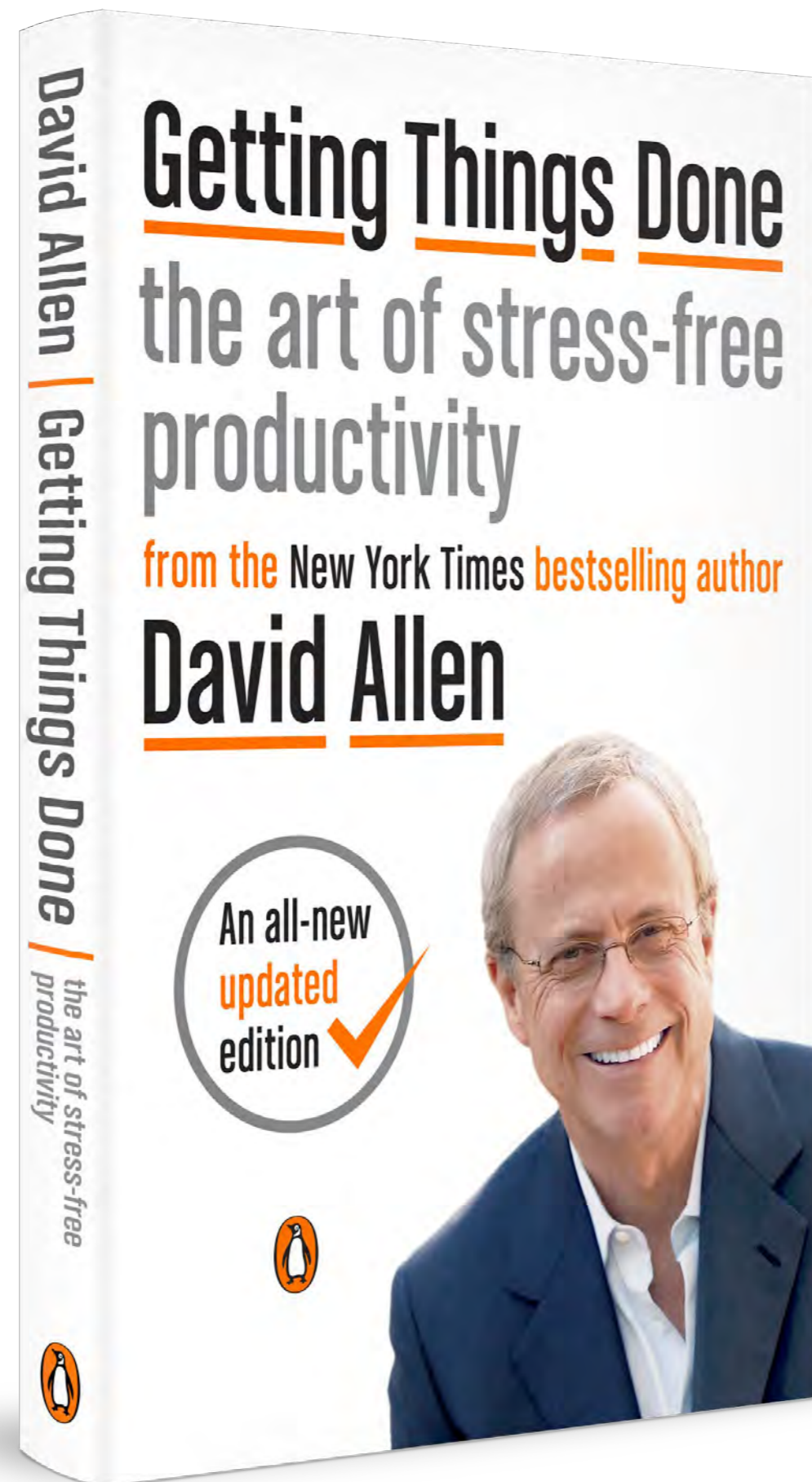
When you spend 45-minutes only processing your inbox, you get through more items which populates your calendar and lists, which allows you to do more of the right stuff throughout the day.



Life is unlikely to slow down any time soon. Follow these four tips to reclaim your time, attention, and energy. Stress-free productivity is possible, but only if you control your incoming requests and existing projects rather than letting them control you.



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Getting Things Done® Training

The skills outlined above hail from Getting Things Done® (GTD®) Training by VitalSmarts. GTD Training teaches skills to manage the near constant flow of requests, tasks, and interruptions people face at all levels of the organization. By learning how to capture, clarify, and organize incoming requests and commitments, people can make better decisions about where to invest their time and energy, focus better on the right priorities, prevent critical tasks and projects from slipping, and reduce stress and burnout.

Get Started

To bring the Getting Things Done skills to your organization for increased productivity and engagement, contact us to learn more. Call **1-800-449-5989** or visit us at vitalsmarts.com.

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