

How To Get Stuff Done

by Del Suggs

It seems like some people are able to move mountains in a day, while other people struggle to accomplish even minimal tasks. If you are a college student, you can feel overwhelmed with all the different duties and obligations you face. Is there a skill you are born with, or can develop, that makes you more productive and successful?

I've developed a pretty simple, and straightforward method of completing tasks. I call it the ACORN technique, and the mighty oak of success can come from this acorn. I use ACORN as an acronym, where each letter stands for step in completing your tasks. But before we delve into how it works, let's look at what we are trying to do.

All those little jobs, chores, assignments, duties, and obligations are basically tasks that you need to complete. Understand that just making a "to-do" list and following it can be deceptive because not all tasks are alike.

There are basically two types of tasks. **Simple tasks** are one thing, one action that you need to complete. If you look at your to-do list, you might see a number of simple tasks like "read Chapter 4 for history class" or "pick up laundry" or "attend club meeting." These are simple tasks, a single action that you can easily complete.

The other type of task is the **Complex Task**. At first

appearance, it may appear to be a single action; however, it's actually a number of individual tasks. For example, your list might include an item such as "write history paper" or "plan club meeting." We know those are complex tasks, and each of them have several steps. In order to "write history paper," you must choose a topic, do the research, write a draft, edit the draft, rewrite it, format, print, and turn it in. That's a lot more than just "write history paper."

You must always break down those complex tasks into the small tasks that they require. Until you've done that, you will be faced with unachievable to-do lists every day.

ACORN

ACORN is an acronym I use to help me complete the obligations I face every single day. Each letter notes a step to follow in creating and executing a successful to-do list.

Assemble

Write down all the things you have to do. Collect all those tasks, and gather all of them together. Capture any information you need to do, and write it down. This is the beginning of your list.

Clarify

Once you've got a collection of tasks, you need to clarify. Which of these tasks is important and urgent? Which of these tasks can

wait until later? It can be a challenge to clarify your tasks, but you must clarify to execute your list of duties.

Break down those complex tasks into lists of simple tasks. This will help you to clarify your assignments, duties, and responsibilities. Once you are clear on what needs to be done, it's time for the next step.

Organize

There are many ways to organize your list. One is the Pareto Principle which says 80% of the work takes 20% of the time, and 20% of the work takes 80% of the time. Look at your collection of task. Which will take the most time, and which will take the least amount of time? Use that information to help organize.

Another method of organizing is the ABC method. With this approach, you label each task based on importance. Any thing which has to be completed today gets an A. Anything that has to be completed by tomorrow gets a B. Everything else gets a C. Now you can organize your task list based on what is most important and urgent.

Review

Now that you've organized your list, it's time to review. Take a long hard look at your list. Is every task listed? Are there any holes or omissions? Is there anything obvious that you forgot? Did you include every task from the

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original list you assembled to begin?

Navigate

Now it's time to take action. You've created a solid, workable plan, a list of tasks that you can complete-- and need to complete. At this point, the route is clear. All you have to do is begin to complete those tasks.

Eat That Frog!

Mark Twain once said, "Eat a live frog first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day." That sounds pretty gross, I know, but Brian Tracy found a way to relate it to procrastination.

Brian Tracy says we need to look at our to-do list every day, and find the one task that we will procrastinate. There is always at least one task on the list we really don't want to do. Think of it as that live frog you have to eat.

Go ahead and eat it first-- right now! If you do, you won't be worrying about having to eat it later. Plus, when you've done it you will find the energy to tackle the rest of your list.

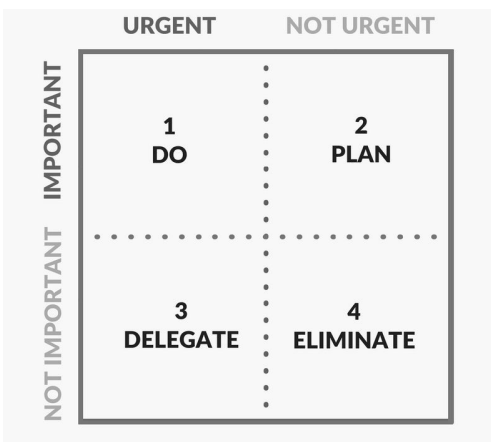
There are a couple of additional points that I'll add when it comes to doing that first hard task every day-- eating that frog. First of all, some days you'll look at your list and find two frogs. Eat the ugliest one first! Second, if you have to eat a live frog, it's a good idea not to sit and look at it too long. Do it

Now!

Eisenhower Matrix

Here is one more trick to help you prioritize your tasks. President Eisenhower had a unique way of analyzing all of the tasks that he faced every day, both as the Commanding General of the US Troops in World War II and as President of the United States.

Imagine a matrix with two rows, and each row has two squares. Across the top you would label "Urgent" and "Not Urgent." On the side, label "Important" and "Not Important."



The top left square is for tasks that are Important and Urgent. Those are the tasks you do right now.

The top right square is for tasks that are Important but not Urgent. Those you schedule and plan to do later.

The bottom left square is for tasks that are Not Important but Urgent. You delegate those, or find someone else to do them.

The bottom right square is for tasks that are not Important and not Urgent. Those you can eliminate all together!

This can be a handy tool for managing a project or a leadership role especially. You may be able to find other members to delegate some of the urgent but not important tasks.

Getting Stuff Done

It's always a challenge to get organized and motivated to complete a project. By breaking those complex tasks down into the simple tasks, you can get a better handle on what needs to be done.

Use the **ACORN** method of Assembling, Clarifying, Organizing, Reviewing, and Navigating your tasks. You will find this to be a useful tool in creating that daily To-Do List that leads to accomplishment!

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