



DavidAllen

Personal Inventory Control

If you let the stockpile of your commitments run amuck, it creates ambient anxiety and unnecessary stress. You'll let that happen if you're using your psyche instead of a system to keep track of those "open loops." Managing a complete, current, and objective inventory of your agreements, in a seamless and leak proof container (not your mind), is the only way out. You must be able to renegotiate those agreements with yourself, almost moment to moment, so they're not inordinately pulling on your psyche and undermining your self trust. In other words, you can only feel good about what you're not doing, when you know what you're not doing.

Here are the keys for having nothing on your mind (other than what you want on your mind):

- **Have and use a ubiquitous personal "capture" tool**
 - Write down any and every potentially useful idea and all should's, need-to's, and want-to's, when and where they occur to you.
- **Have and use pens and legal pads wherever you think, work, communicate**
 - Take notes while you talk, think, and listen. If the writing tools are not at hand, you'll resist the process. Have junior legal pads at every phone.
- **After you write on your pads, tear and toss the pages into your in-basket**
 - Keep the pads clean for new input.
- **Process and clean out your in-basket daily (like you do your answering machine)**
 - If you avoid deciding what you're going to do about the content of the notes, or what they mean to you, sooner than later, you'll subvert the whole flow
- **Organize your resulting actions, projects, reference and support material accordingly**
 - Have a good system of lists that can group things of like nature (all your calls, all the things to do for errands, etc.), plus an easy-to-use filing system for projects notes
- **Review your lists of projects and possible actions consistently enough to trust you're not missing anything**
 - At least once a week remind yourself of all project that you are still committed to finish, and what you need to do next on each one

If you follow these guidelines for corralling your commitments, you'll find that (1) you'll become more conscious and mature about what you commit to (you will start to self-regulate more automatically), and (2) you'll get increasingly comfortable with a big list of undone things. Both of those are critical outcomes for a sustainable life- and workstyle.