

# Do It Now

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A year or two ago, I came up with a brilliant scheme for handling my email. The problem, I decided, was that there was just too much of it. Spam was mixed in with notes from friends along with important things from work and todo items I'd written to myself. What I needed to do was go thru and sort it — pick out the really important stuff to handle right away and move the junk to the bottom. So I wrote a little program that would let me go through and sort my email into neat little folders ordered by priority.

Well, here's what happened: I sorted all my email, and then I didn't answer any of it. I told myself that I shouldn't answer the unimportant stuff until the important stuff was taken care of, then when I looked at the important stuff it seemed hard, so I decided to go read some blogs first. To this day, all those important emails are just sitting there.

Recently, I came up with a really dumb system for handling my email: just do it. I'd start at the top of my inbox, answer the most recent email, and move on to the next one. No excuses. No matter what the email at the top was — no matter how difficult or awkward or unimportant, I had to answer it. I couldn't move on to another email and come back to it later. I had to answer the most recent email, no matter what it was.

By the end of the day, I'd answered a month's worth of email.

We procrastinate because we are afraid. We're afraid it's too much work and that it will drain us. We're afraid we'll screw it up and get in trouble. We're afraid we don't know how to do it. We're afraid because, well, we've been putting it off forever and every time we put it off it seems a little more fearsome in our minds. That's why not putting things off is so liberating. We're forced to confront our fears, not let them grow bigger by repeatedly running away. And when we confront them, we find they're not so scary after all.

This doesn't just apply to email, of course — it works for any todo list. But only if you say no to reordering, prioritizing, estimating deadlines, and doing the most important things first. Forget all that. Do it now.