

Welcome to *Getting Things Done*

WELCOME TO A gold mine of insights into strategies for how to have more energy, be more relaxed, and get a lot more accomplished with much less effort. If you're like me, you like getting things done and doing them well, and yet you also want to savor life in ways that seem increasingly elusive if not downright impossible if you're working too hard. This doesn't have to be an either-or proposition. It *is* possible to be effectively *doing* while you are delightfully *being*, in your ordinary workaday world.

I think efficiency is a good thing. Maybe what you're doing is important, interesting, or useful; or maybe it isn't but it has to be done anyway. In the first case you want to get as much return as you can on your investment of time and energy. In the second, you want to get on to other things as fast as you can, without any nagging loose ends.

And *whatever* you're doing, you'd probably like to be more relaxed, confident that whatever you're doing at the moment is just what you need to be doing—that having a beer with your staff after hours, gazing at your sleeping child in his or her crib at midnight, answering the e-mail in front of you, or spending a few informal minutes with the potential new client after the meeting is exactly what you *ought* to be doing, as you're doing it.

*The art of resting
the mind and the*

*power of
dismissing from it
all care and worry
is probably one of
the secrets of our
great men.*

—Captain J.
A.

Teaching you how to be maximally efficient and relaxed, whenever you need or want to be, was my main purpose in writing this book.

I have searched for a long time, as you may have, for answers to the questions of *what* to do, *when* to do it, and *how* to do it. And after twenty-plus years of developing and applying new methods for personal and organizational productivity, alongside years of rigorous exploration in the self-development arena, I can attest that there is no single, once-and-for-all solution. No software, seminar, cool personal planner, or personal mission statement will simplify your workday or make your choices for you as you move through your day, week, and life. What's more, just when you learn how to enhance your productivity and decision-making at one level, you'll graduate to the next accepted batch of responsibilities and creative goals, whose new challenges will defy the ability of any simple formula or buzzword-du-jour to get you what you want, the way you want to get it.

But if there's no single means of perfecting personal organization and productivity, there *are* things we can do to facilitate them. As I have personally matured, from year to year, I've found deeper and more meaningful, more significant things to focus on and be aware of and do. And I've uncovered simple processes that we can all learn to use that will vastly improve our ability to deal proactively and constructively with the mundane realities of the world.

What follows is a compilation of more than two decades' worth of discoveries about personal productivity—a guide to maximizing output and minimizing input, and to doing so in a world in which work is increasingly voluminous and ambiguous. I have spent many thousands of hours coaching people "in the trenches" at their desks, helping them process and organize all of their work at hand. The methods I have uncovered have proved to be highly effective in all types of organizations, at every job level, across cultures, and even at home and school. After twenty years of coaching and training some of the world's most sophisticated and productive professionals, I know the world is hungry for these methods.

Executives at the top are looking to instill "ruthless execu-

tion" in themselves and their people as a basic standard. They know, and I know, that behind closed doors, after hours, there remain unanswered calls, tasks to be delegated, unprocessed issues from meetings and conversations, personal responsibilities unmanaged, and dozens of e-mails still not dealt with. Many of these businesspeople are successful because the crises they solve and the opportunities they take advantage of are bigger than the problems they allow and create in their own offices and briefcases. But given the pace of business and life today, the equation is in question.

On the one hand, we need proven tools that can help people focus their energies strategically and tactically without letting anything fall through the cracks. On the other, we need to create work environments and skills that will keep the most invested people from burning out due to stress. We need positive work-style standards that will attract and retain the best and brightest.

We know this information is sorely needed in organizations. It's also needed in schools, where our kids are still not being taught how to process information, how to focus on outcomes, or what actions to take to make them happen. And for all of us individually, it's needed so we can take advantage of all the opportunities we're given to add value to our world in a sustainable, self-nurturing way.

The power, simplicity, and effectiveness of what I'm talking about in *Getting Things Done* are best experienced as experiences, in real time, with real situations in your real world. Necessarily, the book must put the essence of this dynamic art of workflow management and personal productivity into a linear format. I've tried to organize it in such a way as to give you both the inspiring big-picture view and a taste of immediate results as you go along.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 describes the whole game, providing a brief overview of the system and an explanation of why it's unique and timely, and then presenting the basic methodologies themselves in their most condensed and

basic form. Part 2 shows you how to implement the system. It's your personal coaching, step by step, on the nitty-gritty application of the models. Part 3 goes even deeper, describing the subtler and more profound results you can expect when you incorporate the methodologies and models into your work and your life.

I want you to hop in. I want you to test this stuff out, even challenge it. I want you to find out for yourself that what I promise is not only possible but instantly accessible to you personally. And I want you to know that everything I propose is *easy to do*. It involves no new skills at all. You already know how to focus, how to write things down, how to decide on outcomes and actions, and how to review options and make choices. You'll validate that many of the things you've been doing instinctively and intuitively all along are *right*. I'll give you ways to leverage those basic skills into new plateaus of effectiveness. I want to inspire you to put all this into a new behavior set that will blow your mind.

Throughout the book I refer to my coaching and seminars on this material. I've worked as a "management consultant" for the last two decades, alone and in small partnerships. My work has consisted primarily of doing private productivity coaching and conducting seminars based on the methods presented here. I (and my colleagues) have coached more than a thousand individuals, trained hundreds of thousands of professionals, and delivered many hundreds of public seminars; This is the background from which I have drawn my experience and examples.

The promise here was well described by a client of mine who wrote, "When I habitually applied the tenets of this program it *saved* my life . . . when I faithfully applied them, it *changed* my life. This is a vaccination against day-to-day fire-fighting (the so-called urgent and crisis demands of any given workday) and an antidote for the imbalance many people bring upon themselves."