

# The Zen of Results

**How to Manage Your Tasks and Get Results**

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**"Absorb what is useful, reject what is useless, add what is specifically your own."  
– Bruce Lee**

# A Short Story – “Deliver Incremental Value”

- It was a warm, sunny day. I was driving a teammate to our lunch destination – our favorite pizza spot, where great thoughts happen.
- When I glanced into my rear-view mirror, I thought about our enormous backlog. It felt like a great weight. I just wanted a fresh start, with the wisdom of our backlog, but without the weight.
- It was at that moment that I realized what bothered me most about our backlog. It wasn't the backlog itself. It was the mindset. I turned to my colleague and said, we need to think in terms of value delivered. We need to get out of the backlog burn-down mindset.
- My colleague pondered. I continued. If we think in terms of value delivered, we leverage timing and opportunity. The problem with a backlog is rot. What if, instead, we viewed it as an input stream, but we actively triage delivering value each day? My colleague's eyes lit up. The light-bulbs went off.
- This mind-set puts the key question front and center – “what's the next best thing we can do, right now?”. The next best thing may happen to be the next item in the backlog. Or it may be responding to an emerging customer need. Or it may be nailing a fleeting window of opportunity. Asking the question helps reveal the answer.
- Either way, the mind-set renewed us. The mindset was the key. We were once again in control of our results. We were deliberately carving out value and that felt good. The lesson I learned was ...

*... Think in value delivered over backlog burn-down!*

- J.D. Meier

# **The Rhythm for Results**

# Monday Vision, Daily Outcomes, Friday Reflection

This is my approach for driving results. It scales across teams. The key is outcomes over tasks.

## Monday Vision

- Each Monday, identify the most important outcomes for the week.
- Take the time to see the forest from the trees.

## Daily Outcomes

- Each day, make a short To Do list (toward Outcomes)
- Title it by date (e.g. 01-29-08).
- Start by listing your MUST items. Next, list your SHOULD or COULD.
- Use this list throughout your day, as you fish your various streams for action (Your streams include meetings, email, conversations, or bursts of brilliance throughout the day.)

## Friday Reflection

- Evaluate what you got done, or didn't, and why.
- Identify 3 things that are working well.
- Identify 3 things that are not working well.
- Carry your lessons forward to your Monday Vision.

# The Tools

# 3 Key Tools for Results

## 1 - Outcomes

- Frame your results and outcomes using key buckets:
  - Work projects
  - Personal projects
  - Life frame (mind, body, emotions, career, financial, relationships)
- Identify key outcomes and results in key buckets.
- Scannable outcomes - Quick views to remind you what you want to accomplish.

## 2 - Lists

### To Do Lists

- Create To Do Lists each day (Tickler Lists for Action)
- Sanity check your To Do list against your Outcomes.
- Your To Do list should reflect actions toward your outcomes.

### Queues

- One list per project or chunk of work.

## 3 - Calendar.

- Schedule your results.
- Block time for what's important.
- Make (and keep) appointments with yourself (schedule time for execution or think time as you need it).

# Outcomes (Life, Work, Personal)

## Outcomes

- List your outcomes – the key goals you want in key areas of your work projects, personal projects, and life frame.
- Create compelling outcomes you want for your future.
- Think of an outcome as the end in mind. It's an experience that you want in the future. An outcome is a well formed goal that you can see, hear, and feel.
- Your tasks will move you towards or away from your outcomes.
- Outcomes guide your tasks. They help you course-correct.

## Life Frame

- Body
- Career
- Emotions
- Financial
- Fun
- Mind
- Relationships

## Work Projects

- Top 3 Outcomes

## Personal Projects

- Top 3 Outcomes

Figure out your outcomes by asking ...

*“What do you want to accomplish?”*



# To Dos – “Tickler Lists” for Action

## Key Points

- Each day create a new list. For example, you might title your list 2008-12-09.
- Start by asking, what are the 3 best outcomes for today? (Get in your most effective mindset).
- Next, ask, what are the 3 things you MUST get done today?
- Next, check your input streams (email, notes, head, intuition) write down any action items.
- Check your queues for the next best thing to do.
- Bubble the most important to the top, let the rest sink to the bottom.
- Sort however you like, but keep your 3 MUSTs at the top.

Time changes what's important!  
Each day is a new day ... Let stuff slough off ...  
... If it's important, you can add it today.

Think in terms of MUST, SHOULD and COULD.  
It's free form – organize in a way that works for you.

# Queues

## Key Points

- Create a list for each project or workstream you care about.
- Whenever you have a potential action, add it to your list.
- You can create a queue list for each work project, personal project, or category in your life frame:
  - Work Projects
  - Personal Projects
  - Life Frame (Body, Career, Emotions, Financial, Fun, Mind, Relationships)

Time changes what's important!  
Each day is a new day ... Let stuff slough off ...  
... If it's important, you can add it today.

# Schedule Items You Need Time For

## Key Points

- First baseline your schedule. Note your committed time and free time.
- Consolidate activities that make you weak where you can.
- Move activities that make you weak to the morning, where you can.
- Spend 75% or more of your time on your strengths.
- Create timeblocks to consolidate, batch and focus on key activities.
- Make time for important activities, including alone time, fun, time with people, ... etc..

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							
10:00							
11:00							
12:00							
1:00							
2:00							
3:00							
4:00							
5:00							
6:00							
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							
10:00							

If you schedule it, it happens.

# More Information

# Key Concepts

- Carve out time for what's important!
- Outcomes guide your action.
- Keep your outcomes scannable at a glance.
- Organize outcomes by work projects, personal projects, and life frame (Body, Career, Emotions, Financial, Fun, Mind, Relationships).
- Balance is your friend.
- Prioritize incoming action items against your outcomes.
- Triage incoming action items to either do it, queue it, schedule it, or delegate it.
- Use daily tickler lists for action items.
- Schedule items that will take time.
- Think in terms of value delivered (to yourself or others).
- Windows of opportunity matter!
- If you fall off the horse, you can get back on.
- It's question-driven.
- Principles, patterns and practices over tool-driven.

# Benefits of the Daily To Do List

- It works!
- Low overhead
- You start fresh each day
- For that day, you focus on what's your best value
- You can decide what to carry forward
- Lower priority or lower value naturally sloughs off

# The Why Behind the Approach

- It's simple. For any system to stick, simplicity matters.
- You're in control. All this does it help you make better, rapid decisions about your next best thing to do – at a glance.
- Using categories helps you keep the important things in mind.
- If your lists are scannable, your brain can quickly figure out what matters.
- If you know your key outcomes, you can make effective trade-offs.
- If you keep a daily tickler list for action, you can free up your mind for other thoughts.
- If you use your daily tickler list for action, you can quickly set your sequence and priorities vs. react or get randomized.
- This low overhead approach, avoids the “death by a 1000 paper cuts” of micro-managing your minutia. Focus on the big rocks and the minutia falls into place.

The End



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