# ORGANIZING

# Five tips to go from paralysis to progress

"I'm so overwhelmed!" It's a common refrain in times of stress. When we reach this point, despite the growing mass of work to be done, we can sometimes reach a standstill where we're getting absolutely nothing accomplished. The intimidating mountain of tasks looms menacingly in the distance, but we are stuck. How do we combat this paralysis and actually make progress?

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### START WITH A BRAIN DUMP

Sometimes we're overwhelmed because we know we have a ton of things to do, but we don't have them recorded in any way. We're just trying to remember them all. We flounder around with a feeling of unease, fearful of forgetting something crucial.

In his landmark book "Getting Things Done," David Allen calls these items we're trying to store in our brain "open loops." Open loops are items that are incomplete and pulling at our attention. The best way to deal with these open loops is to start with a brain dump.

Set aside at least 20 minutes with paper and pen. Normally I prefer typing into a document, but I actually recommend paper for this because you don't want to be taking time to worry about formatting, typos, grammar, etc. Just focus on quickly recording all of the things you know you need to do, things you're worried about, upcoming events, etc.

Your brain dump list could be as varied as "Stop at the grocery for eggs and milk," "Register for next semester" and "Finish reading that article." Jot down anything that's in your head using single words or short phrases.

Taking the time to free up your brain will make you more productive and less stressed as well!



Done is better than perfect. Don't let your fears of doing a task perfectly prevent you from getting started.

METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

### GET YOUR TASKS ORGANIZED

Now that you've gotten everything out of your head, you need a way to convert this hastily scribbled paper list into a better format. Using David Allen terminology, you need to get those open loops into "trusted systems." A trusted system is a logical place outside of your head where you can store the tasks. Your trusted system will allow you to keep track of items, prioritize them, refer to them frequently, and check tasks off as you accomplish them.

There are plenty of options for trusted systems. Depending on your preferences, you may choose paper or digital or a combination of both. Paper tools could include a simple list, a notebook or a journal. Digital tools could include apps like Trello (my personal favorite), AnyList, the Notes app on your phone, the Reminders app, Evernote, Google Tasks, or many others. It's infinitely more important to have a tool(s) and use it consistently than to choose the perfect tool(s).

With all of your tasks in trusted systems, you can prioritize them by date, level of importance, or any way that is most helpful for you. I don't know about you, but if I have 1,000 things to do but don't have them in an organized list, I am completely paralyzed by overwhelm. But if I have the same 1,000 things to do but have them in a prioritized list with an action plan, I may have just as many tasks awaiting me, but I'm emotionally in control and ready for action!

### JUST GET STARTED!

Occasionally all it takes for me to break out of that paralysis is to take some kind of action. Once I get going, I quickly build up some momentum, and then "success breeds success." Oftentimes I have found that the task I have procrastinated because it looked so intimidating is not nearly as daunting as I had built it up to be in my mind.

If you're a Type A perfectionist like me, you might find yourself hesitating to start a task because you don't have all of the information, the right tools, or the complete plan. Sometimes these are valid reasons to delay. But more often than not, we're just obsessing over it because we want it to be perfect.

Repeat to yourself this mantra: "Done is better than perfect." I'm not suggesting you do shoddy work, but don't let your fears of doing a task perfectly prevent you from getting started. The quicker you get going on it, the quicker you will finish. If the lack of perfection bothers you enough, you may be able to tweak it a bit later. Or you may decide to just "get over yourself" and let it be slightly imperfect because you realize those tiny details really didn't matter that much.

### ADD ACCOUNTABILITY

Now that you have started working on your tasks, what if you get stuck, paralyzed and overwhelmed again? If you're not making good progress in checking off those tasks, you might want to include some sort of accountability. Telling someone about your plans is a great way to force yourself into action. When that person asks you how it's going, you'll want to give them a positive update.

There are strategies aplenty for including accountability. Here's an example that I used myself recently. I have always loved to read and identified myself as a reader.

But once I became a business owner, I found that I was rarely reading for pleasure, and I really missed it. I tried just looking for bits of time to read, but there was always something more pressing to do.

Then I remembered that years ago when I was in a book club, I always found the time to read. I loved getting together with the group to discuss the book, and I certainly didn't want to show up without having read it. So I joined another book club, and voila! I'm reading again! Consider adding accountability for some of the tasks on your "to do" list. You might find it makes a world of difference!

### BUILD IN SOME REWARDS

Reward yourself for small accomplishments. After you've knocked one of those high-priority items off your list, take a short break. Pat yourself on the back. Just knowing that you've got a reward waiting after the completion of an unnerving task can give you the additional motivation to stick to it.

Ready to get started? Start with your brain dump. Pick your tools for your trusted system. Get organized, take that first step, add some accountability, and plan some great rewards. Goodbye, paralysis and hello, progress!

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