

1-on-1: David Allen's Two Minute Rule

Time-management tips from the expert

David Allen is a time management consultant and best-selling author. He has developed productivity and improvement programs for more than a million professionals in a hundred organizations, including Fortune 500 corporations, global not-for-profits and U.S. government agencies. He runs a multimillion dollar company and has written three books, including Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity and Ready for Anything: 52 Productivity Principles for Getting Things Done. David Allen discusses his two-minute rule for getting more done with SUCCESS.

SUCCESS: You talk about people using small windows of time to get more accomplished. Tell us how to do this effectively.

David Allen: A lot of people procrastinate because they don't know what their next action should be. When you actually make the determination of what to do next, when you say, 'Oh wait a minute, you know, I could do that pretty fast,' that's when you make progress. It might be surf the Web to get a piece of information, or it could be pick up the phone and leave a message for your sister on her voicemail... Many times the next step on something is something that could be done fairly quickly. So the first thing to do is to make sure you've got everything broken down to the next action level. And then if you get a window of time, glance at all those actions and pick one that might fit within that kind of time frame. The truth is a lot of things take less than two minutes to get done.

SUCCESS: Tell us about your two-minute rule.

David Allen: I have a two-minute rule that says: If you determine an action can be done in two minutes, you actually should do it right then because it'll take longer to organize it and review it than it would be to actually finish it the first time you notice it. If you don't avoid the question about what's the next step, lots of two minute items could be done right then. Now, there are many times that you have a next step that's going to take longer amount of time, like drafting some big new spreadsheet. You wouldn't want to do that in two minutes. It's a good idea to keep a whole lot of little things to do when you get those strange little windows of time, like clean up old e-mails, or purge some of your files. There's a lot of things around me to do when I get a weird little window of time and when I don't have a lot of energy. Let's say I finished a big phone call and I don't have another one for seven minutes, I'm likely to just be cleaning spam out of my e-mails or you know purging a file, or perhaps going and getting a cup of coffee.

SUCCESS: This two-minute rule you talk about is one of the things that I've learned from you and use every day. You know, an e-mail lands in your inbox and you make a decision, is this something I can get done in two minutes? And if it is, just clear it out, do it, get it done, move on. If it's not, then file it for chunks of time when you're going to be focused on those kind of activities. Is that correct?

David Allen: Yes. You know, a lot of people have found that to be an absolutely powerful part of my book, *Getting Things Done*, and I think it's not just the efficiency of getting rid of the two-minute things, it's also not having to park it, look at it again and re-think it again. Get it out. Be like Teflon. Let it get out of there. I think it trains people to be making executive decisions about exactly what they need to do about stuff when it comes across. Is this something I can get done in two minutes? That question is actually tricking you into making an executive decision about what is the next thing that needs to happen and that's really the training people need.

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