READ WITH ME

Getting Things Done

by David Allen

If I trace my productivity journey back to one moment, it's the day someone handed me Getting Things Done by David Allen. What looked like just another time-management book turned out to be the framework for a completely different way of working - and thinking.

The idea that stopped me

At its core, Getting Things Done is built on a deceptively simple idea - your mind is for having ideas, not for holding them. That one line stopped me in my tracks, and a year-long process of unlearning to relearn began. Like most of us, I'd been conditioned to use my head as the storage system. School taught us to memorise for exams, to learn "memory" techniques, to hold it all.

So I was operating with a mind full of open loops - unfinished tasks, half-baked ideas, things I might do someday - all rattling around with no system to manage them. I didn't realise it at the time, but that mental clutter was exhausting me and stealing the clarity I needed to do my best work.

What I took from it

David Allen gives you a way to capture and organise everything life throws at you, and then be clear about what to do with it. These are the pieces that shaped how I work.

- **Capture everything.** Get it all out of your head - every task, idea and commitment - into a trusted external system. Notebook, app, task manager, whatever you'll actually use. The relief of not having to remember it all is real.
- **Clarify and organise.** Don't just capture..... decide. Is this actionable? What's the very next action? Defining that next action is what creates momentum and kills procrastination.
- **The two-minute rule.** If it takes less than two minutes, do it now. This one rule changed how I handle small tasks and shrank the invisible backlog of tiny to-dos that quietly drain energy.
- **Context lists.** Not everything can or should be done right now. Allen organises tasks by context - @Phone, @Computer, @Office, @Errands - so you match the task to the time and place you're in.
- **The weekly review.** Arguably the most powerful habit in the system (I now do a weekly preview as well). Time each week to look over your commitments, projects and next actions keeps the system trusted and your mind clear. It became a non-negotiable ritual for me (well, to be honest, mostly!).

Should you read it?

Here's where I'll be really honest..... I don't actually recommend reading the book. I'm an avid reader, and even I found it hard going and quite dry (you might feel differently). I include it here because it's a powerful prompt to start thinking differently about productivity, and about how directly it links to hauora - your wellbeing - and that constant feeling of never having enough time.

For me, Getting Things Done was about freeing up mental space, lowering the stress, and creating more capacity for what really matters - in work, in life, in my own wellbeing. That's the real productivity win. It changed how I think about work, priorities and head space, and it opened the door to everything I explored next - digital minimalism, Tiago Forte's PARA method, the neuroscience of focus. But this is where it started.

If you want to reclaim control, reduce the overwhelm and make space for meaningful work, start here. And remember - every big project, every life-changing goal, every productivity journey starts with one question.

What's the very next action?

Lisa's reading notes, first shared on radicalhr.nz