<u>HOW TO LEAVE WORK AT WORK</u>

"How do I leave work at work?" I'm frequently asked this question and its countless variations: "How do I separate my work time from my personal time?" "How do I stop my brain from constantly thinking about work while I'm at home?" I could go on but you get the idea.

Most recently a participant at an event I hosted asked the question. At the start of the event I asked the participants to share their desired outcomes for the event – the one thing that if they learned it, it would make their investment of time and money both valuable and profitable. Their outcomes included how to reduce stress, achieve work/life balance, be more productive, and leave work at work.

When you dig a little deeper, you discover that you can reduce stress, achieve whole-life balance, and be more productive when you leave work at work. Stopping the Monkey Mind from constantly thinking about work while you're at home is the gateway to achieving your desired outcomes. So, how do you solve the problem and leave work at work? By emptying your head.

I'm going to share with you a system I have used over the years that has allowed me to leave work at work and be fully present when I'm at home with my family. The genesis of the system is derived from the book *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity* by David Allen.[1]

Before creating and using this system, I would leave work for the day or weekend or even a vacation and my mind would constantly think of all the things I had to do...or even worse, forgot to do. As this endless loop continued to play in my mind, I became stressed and anxious and would spend my time while at home with my family thinking about work, checking email, and sneaking off to my home office. Sound familiar? That's when I decided to empty my head.

The science behind the system is that whenever you accept or create a task for yourself, your brain stores that task in your unconscious mind (or what David Allen calls your Psychic RAM[2]) as an open-loop or incomplete task. And that task will "eat away at you" because your Psychic RAM has no concept of time and wants you to work on all your tasks all the time until their complete.   Your mind then constantly replays these open-loops which causes pressure to build-up resulting in stress and anxiety. Similar to releasing the pressure on a computer's RAM, you need to relieve the pressure on your Psychic Ram. And that's done by getting the tasks out of your head and written down.

Once all your incomplete tasks are out of your head and written down, your mind is free to stop working on them. Your stress and anxiety will be reduced, and you'll be more effective, efficient, and productive. Cognitive neuroscience refers to this as Distributed Cognition.[3] Basically, you are distributing the thought process of remembering and working on the incomplete task from your mind to the inanimate object – the piece of paper or computer program.

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[1] Allen, David. *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity.* Penguin Books; Revised edition (March 17, 2015). Print.

[2] Similar to a computer's RAM (random access memory).

[3] Distributed Cognition is a branch of cognitive science that proposes cognition and knowledge are not confined to an individual; rather, it is distributed across objects, individuals, artefacts, and in the environment. David L., "Distributed Cognition (DCog)," in *Learning Theories*, February 25, 2007, https:www.learning-theories.com/distributed-cognition-dcog.html.

Okay, enough of the science – let's focus on emptying our heads. Remember that email you opened this morning but didn't respond to? Or that discovery response you considered doing but haven't started? Even better, what incomplete task did you think of while reading this article? All those items are open-loops taking up space in your head causing unnecessary stress and anxiety.

The only way to close those open-loops are to complete them or get them out of your head. So the first step is capturing all your incomplete tasks in one place. This part usually takes the longest because if you're anything like me you have dozens of open-loops at any moment and you might have them on your to-do list, in your computer, on your phone, in text messages from your significant other, on random post-it notes, written on your work calendar, written on your home calendar, scribbled on scraps of paper in your car, or just floating around in your mind. Until you have captured your entire universe of incomplete tasks in one place your mind will keep searching and searching for more.

Once you've captured all your tasks, the next step is to process them. Decide what the task is and what to do with it - if anything. If there's nothing for you to do, throw it out or file it. Don't leave it sitting around taking up space.

If there *is* something for you to do, can you do it in two minutes or less? If yes, do it! If no, delegate it or defer it to a later time by tracking it in a trusted system that you consistently review and update.[4]

Once you have captured all your incomplete tasks in one place and processed them by either deleting, doing, delegating, or deferring them into a trusted system, your mind can let go and you will leave work at work.

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[4] This is a much abbreviated version of the custom system I created and use. If you're interested in a comprehensive explanation of the complete system from its original source, I highly recommend David Allen's book: *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*.