

Tools, tips and tricks for improving (research) productivity

Luc Beaulieu, Ph.D., FAAPM, FCOMP

*Professor et Director, Université Laval Cancer Research Centre
Medical Physicist, CHU de Québec – Université Laval*



JULY 12–16
VANCOUVER, BC

JOINT AAPM | COMP MEETING

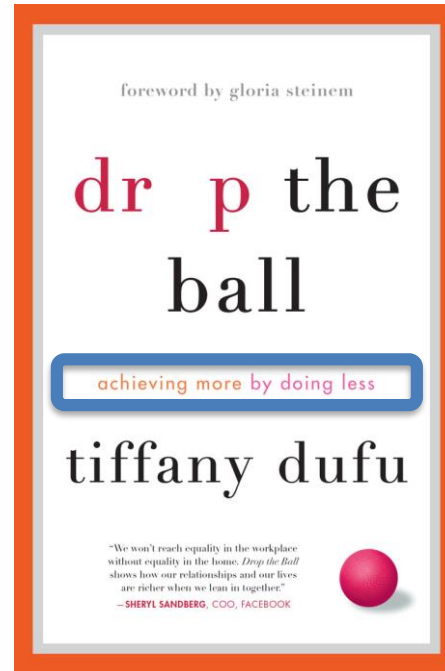


To Drop the Ball

INFORMAL • NORTH AMERICAN
make a mistake; mishandle
things.

"I really dropped the ball on
this one"

- Google Dictionary



FIND OUR INTERACTIVE QUESTIONS HERE =>



Highlights - #1

- Saying **NO** is the most powerful thing you can do for yourself... and others
 - ✓ **NO** opens up new possibilities down the road
 - ✓ Makes your **YES** stronger



- Corollary -

- You need to know as accurately as possible at any time what's on your plate in order to decide **to take on (YES) or not (NO)** new stuff.

✓ You head is not the place to store that information!



How *stuff* come to you?

- Written:
 - ✓ Paper
 - ✓ Teams, Slacks, ...
 - ✓ **E-mails!**
- Verbally (e.g. boss, colleagues, spouse ...)
 - ✓ Becomes a written note somewhere!
- Your own: while reading, jogging, ...
 - ✓ Becomes a written note somewhere!



Productivity

- Being busy \neq being productive ...



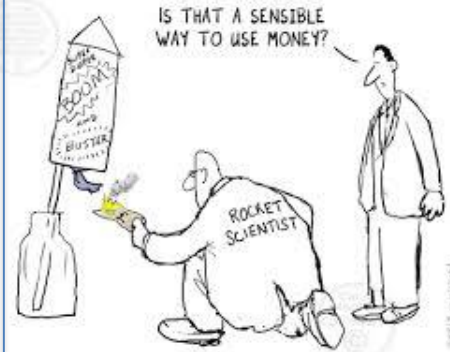
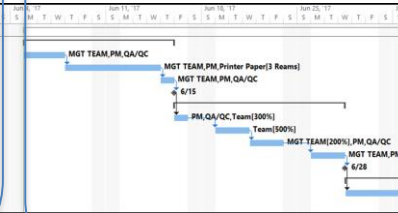
Productivity

Project Planning Phase



Task Name	Duration	Start
0 Project Lifecycle	46.3 days	6/3/2017
1 Define the project	9 days	6/3/2017
2 Create and negotiate definition documents	3 days	6/6/2017
3 Create and publish project announcement	5 days	6/6/2017
4 Assemble and organize project team	1 day	6/15/2017
5 Control Gate: Planning	0 days	6/15/2017
6 Plan the project	8.5 days	6/16/2017
7 Create tasks and organize per definition documents	1 day	6/16/2017
8 Sequence tasks and estimate durations	2.3 days	6/19/2017
9 Identify resources and assign to tasks	2.3 days	6/21/2017
10 Level resources and get buy off from management	2.3 days	6/26/2017
11 Control Gate: Begin Work	0 days	6/26/2017
12 Conduct project work and reviews	24 days	6/26/2017
13 Conduct work cycle 1	7 days	6/26/2017
14 Review for quality 1	1 day	7/7/2017

Tasks Definition



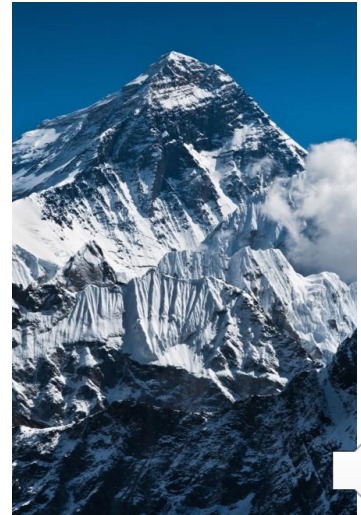
idea

doing



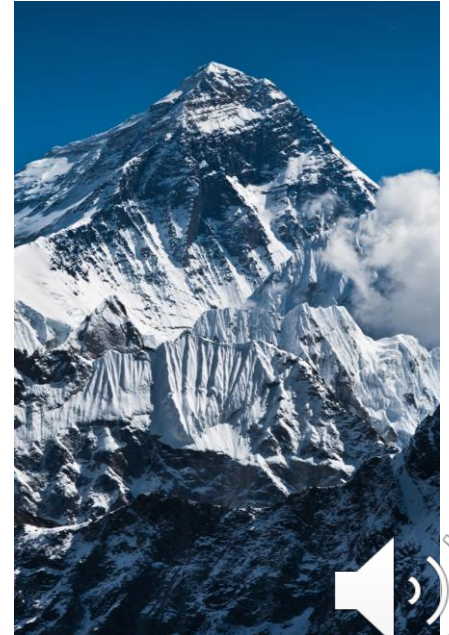
Highlight - #2

- **Projects** are not *doable* by themselves!
 - ✓ Must have a clear definition of success from the get go
 - ✓ Must be broken up in **tasks**
 - Tasks can be parallel or sequential
 - Tasks can sometimes be delegated!



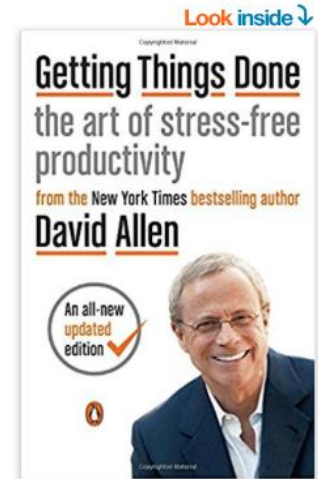
Highlight - #3

- A **task** is the smallest actionable steps to accomplish a larger body work i.e. a project
 - ✓ Write a scientific paper is not a task
 - ✓ Writing a grant is not a task
 - ✓ ... **Climbing Mount Everest is not a task**

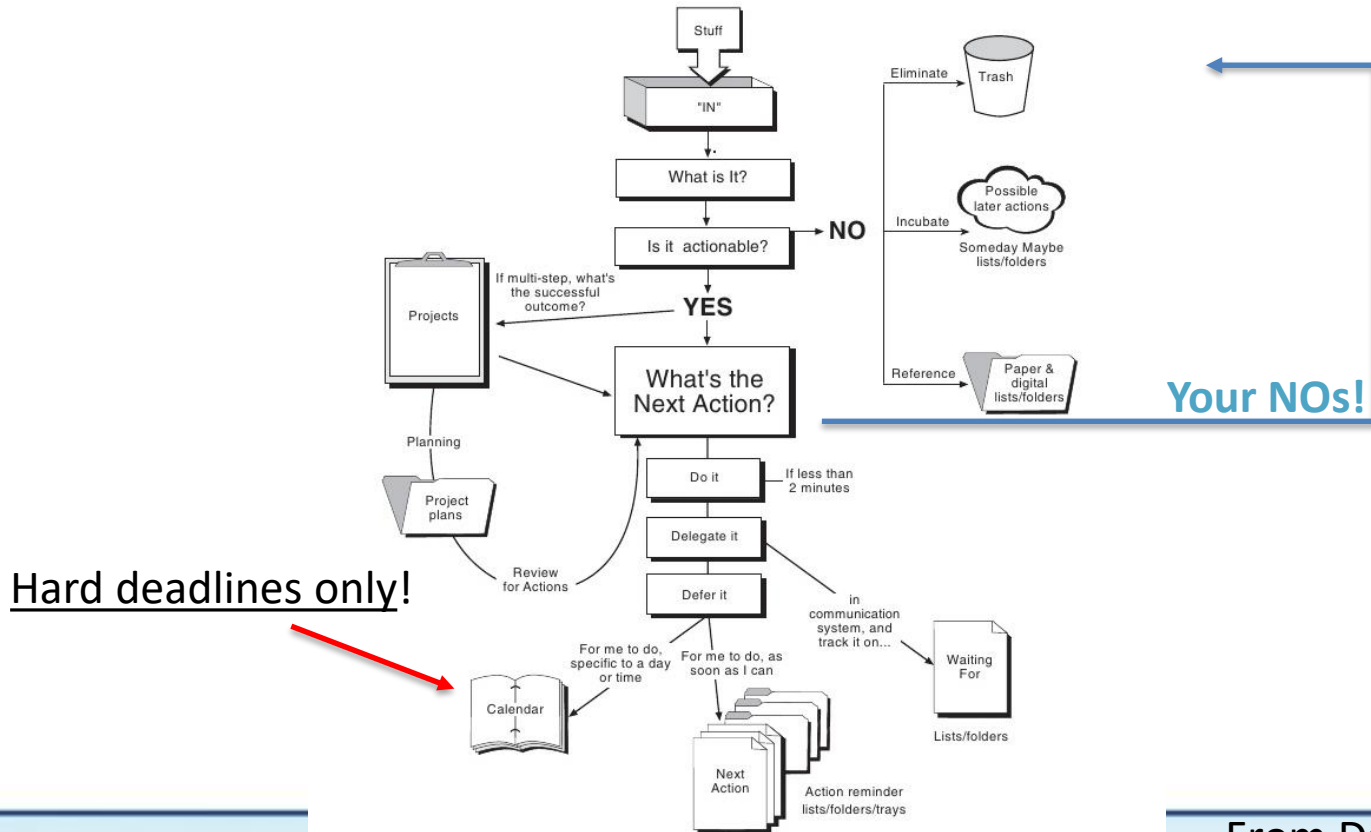


Doing – Day to Day = Tasks

- **Getting Things Done (GTD),**
- Kanban,
- SCRUM,
- Agile,
- Eisenhower Matrix,
- ...



GTD Approach



4 D's of Productivity

These are the decisions/actions you need to take for each input you receive



Delete (incl. all your NO's)



Delegate



Defer



Do



Limited # of containers...and tools

- Calendar = **hard deadlines**, incl. events/meetings
 - Tickler/eTickler (43 folders): documents needed at specific dates
- Folders (paper or digital): documentations for projects and references
 - ✓ Scientific literature: Zotero, Mendeley, Paperpiles, ReadCube Papers, EndNotes...
 - Document managers: Evernote, OneNote (Mac/Win), DevonThink Pro (Mac), ...
- E-mails: Outlook, Apple Mail, Spark, ...
 - New *stuff* -> action items
 - Reference materials
- Note taking tools: pens+papers and apps
 - OneNote, Apple Notes, ...



Missing Key Container: a Task Manager!



Hybrid



- **Task Manager** = trusted system for all of your tasks
- Email apps are very poor task manager
 - ✓ Communication/exchange tool
 - ✓ Reference/support materials to projects and tasks
- Post-it are visual (Kanban!) but
 - ✓ Not scalable to a large number of projects/tasks
- Paper lists work very nicely
 - ✓ High upkeep cost
 - ✓ Not readily searchable, rearrangeable, no automation



A good Task Manager ...

- Must allow for projects (folders of tasks)
- Must allow for groups/folders of projects (areas of responsibility)
- Must allow for repeating and scheduling of tasks
- Able to build templete for repetitive projects (e.g. new students)
- Have contexts/tags for each task (tools, energy, time, location...)
- Integration with other apps (e-mail, ...) – across all your devices

- Nice to have:
 - ✓ Possible to have sub-tasks (mini-projects with a project)
 - ✓ Automatic location base task suggestions (and other automations)
 - ✓ Parallel vs sequential tasks
 - ✓ Scripting (power users)
 - ✓ Delegate tasks electronically (collaborative) from the software...



Task Manager – Which One?

Free and good enough



Microsoft To-Do

PC/Mac/iOS/Android/Web
(Formerly: Wunderlist)

Paying...and the best on the market



All platforms
(Including Linux)



OmniFocus



Things

Mac/iOS Only

Outlook or OneNote are not true, scalable task managers



Task Manager

- Your task manager (and calendar) is the **cornerstone** of your **day-to-day** productivity
 - ✓ You need to be able to thrust that you will put everything in it
 - You need to love it and want to use it (otherwise, it won't work)
 - It needs to be efficient (work with it not on it!)
 - Do not hesitate to pay for a quality app if it help!



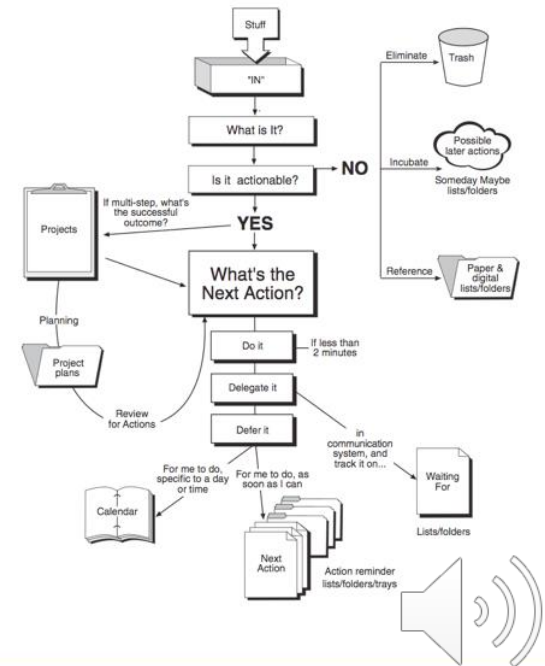
How much time to set-up?

- To set-up a complete first dump of what's in your head (and accumulated papers, post-it, e-mails, ...): all inboxes from all sources!
 - ✓ At least 2 days following (religiously) the GTD book
 - More if you also want to go 100% digital (yes I am getting that old...)
 - ✓ ~ 2h/week thereafter for *maintenance*
 - Reserve time with yourself in your Agenda!



Maintenance = Weekly Review

- **Mandatory**: reserve **1.5 to 2h weekly** to review all new inputs (incl. potential projects) and past projects/tasks
 - ✓ Decide what to do with them (actionable? 4D's!)
 - ✓ Did you miss something (any projects with no next step/task defined?)
 - ✓ What should have your attention next week?
 - ✓ Do you have the bandwidth to start new things?
 - **Yes**: let's look at my list of *sleeping* ideas / *backburner* !



Stick to it for 3-4 months!

- This investment will pay off...
 - ✓ Make it an automatism
 - ✓ Do a *braindump*/review anytime you start feeling nervous/anxious about work



Task Manager → Doing

EISENHOWER MATRIX



Morning / evening routine

- Calendar
- Task Manager
 - Can be a recurring task...

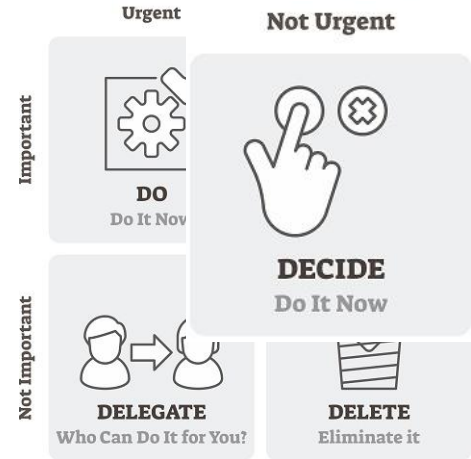
A few minutes at most!



Highlight - #4

- Choosing to do something (now) or take on new stuff (later), you are:

- ✓ Negotiating with yourself about your time
- ✓ Taking into account all of your **must do** tasks



- If you always do only **must do** tasks

- ✓ No control of your schedule → You will drop the ball



Conclusion

- Adopt a **true** task manager
 - ✓ Use tools that you love, do not hesitate to pay for a good one
- Give your task manager the task to hold **all of your ideas and tasks.**
 - ✓ Use your brain for productive things!
- Projects **must** be broken down and success identified
- Be **ruthless -> delete!**



Remember!

Do not be afraid to say a positive NO

=

Choosing when to drop the ball!

