How to actually finish things when you're full of ideas v.9.3

A step-by-step guide for xNxP's (and anyone else who gets overwhelmed with todos) to feel more productive, less stressed, and more fulfilled in life

Michael Caloz

(an ENTP who spent his 20's with so many amazing project ideas gathering dust in his draft folders… then managed to dramatically turn it all around to publicly release his work again and again without stress—*most* days at least!)

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Part 1:
Introducing the system

I was right where I bet you are now

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Like you (I imagine), for most of my life, ***I thought of myself as someone who has trouble finishing things.***

As an ENTP personality type, I'm great at coming up with all sorts of ideas. But actually *doing* something with them felt impossible.

I had endless todo lists across all the major productivity apps and systems. Literally dozens of unfinished projects and draft blog posts on my computer.

And every single day, ***I felt a low-level anxiety in my body around all the things I was procrastinating on.***

Sound familiar?

As a coach, I work with a lot of ENTP's and INTP's, and this is the story of our lives. Every single NTP client of mine has these issues *(plus most NFP's, and even some NTJ's and NFJ's too)*.

I have good news: There is a solution.

I used that solution to transform myself—from someone who never finished anything, to someone who, in just the last few years:

- Quit my old corporate job and created a successful business *(one that I find deeply fulfilling and that offers me huge flexibility & freedom)*;
- Hosted a highly-rated podcast series *(40,000+ downloads)*;
- Achieved significant SEO success *(#1 Google ranking for multiple important keywords)*, and nearly a million website visitors/year;
- Published a piece of writing every single day *(for months)*;
- Created a detailed video course *(with over 60 lessons)*;
- Wrote two other "tiny-books" *(like this one)* and three deep-dive blog series *(each as long as a full book)*.

But, getting there requires two things.

First, I invite you to ignore most "productivity" advice that's written by people with different types of minds, different priorities, and different values.

Don't try to break your day up into tiny scheduled blocks on your calendar.

Don't focus on KPI's and use elaborate productivity systems.

Shifting your mindset

Second, you have to be willing to make some big changes in how you think about productivity (and even how you define success for yourself).

For example, let's begin with a hard lesson that it took me many years to finally understand:

It's because you think you can do everything that you can't actually finish anything.

Read that again (and, "thinking" here could be unconscious too).

I know it might not feel good to read that. You know that you have so much potential, and I bet you have lots of big, awesome ideas. Why *wouldn't* you want to accomplish them all?

I get it. And, would you rather keep fooling yourself that you'll finish a dozen projects "someday"? Or would you like to actually ***finish one?***

If you really stop to think about it, life is an exercise in saying "yes" to only the tiniest, *tiniest* percentage of possible things.

Think about all the different schools you could have attended. All the different careers you could have chosen. All the places you could have lived. All the people you could have become friends with…

In this sense, there are infinite alternative branches of your life. Each would have led to totally different opportunities and choices.

But in *this* timeline, you've said "no" to all those other things and "yes" to the comparatively small number of things that have led to your current life.

As soon as you realize that it's impossible to do everything—and, in fact, that ***you've already said "no" to millions of possibilities throughout your life***—it becomes a lot easier to say "no" to even *more* things.

And that allows you to say "*yes*" to the things that matter most. That's ***how you begin to actually finish things.***

This piece is crucial for you to understand

Being alive means constantly saying no to most things—whether you realize it or not—and yes to only the tiniest fraction of possibilities.

Therefore, you must practice accepting that *most* of your ideas and momentary desires won't come to fruition, and that's ok. Focus on the ones that can and will.

Check out the image on the right, from waitbutwhy.

In literally every moment, endless choice paths are closing, and endless other ones are opening.

"But I wanted *that* one," you say. "These *other* paths won't be as good."

Do you really know that for sure?

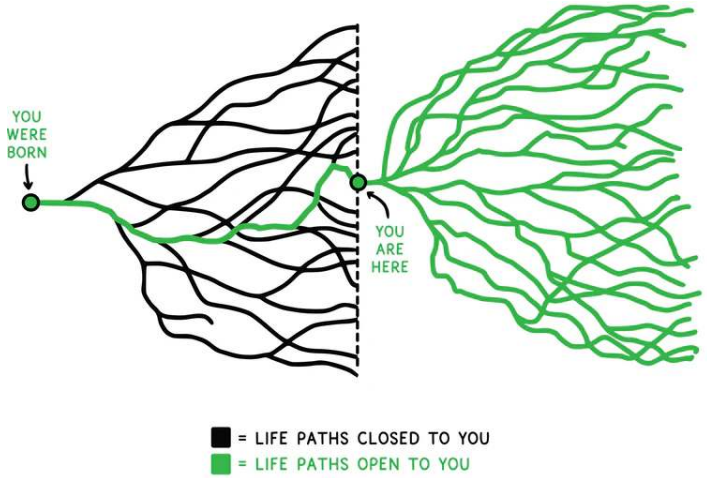
Consider this very shortened version of the "Chinese farmer" parable from Daoism (popularized by Alan Watts):

A farmer's prized horse runs away.
The neighbors say, "What bad luck!"
The farmer replies, "Maybe."

The horse eventually returns, bringing several beautiful wild horses with it.
"What good luck!" the neighbors say.
"Maybe," says the farmer.

While trying to tame one of the new horses, the farmer's son breaks his leg.
"How terrible," say the neighbors.
"Maybe," says the farmer.

Soldiers come to draft young men for war—but pass over the injured son.
"Such good fortune," say the neighbors.
"Maybe."



What we'll be doing here

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One more note before we get started:

Most personal growth books are way too long—a few key ideas spread out with a lot of fluff.

I've taken a different approach with my "tiny-books": shorter length and greater density, but hopefully without sacrificing readability.

This is a very short guide (around 40 pages like this), so it's highly-targeted at people generally like me.

Not just in terms of personality type (i.e., NTP's and similar types), but in terms of life situation.

In particular, it's targeted at people who, like myself, have certain privileges—things like regular access to food, water, shelter, autonomy, opportunity, freedom from oppression, and so on.

Without those, being "productive" or "more aligned with your life purpose" might not even be concepts that make sense or feel relevant.

And, even if you *are* someone with those privileges in place, you still might struggle to know what's truly important to you in life.

Toward the end of this tiny-book, I'll give you some tips for finding what's most fascinating or compelling to you.

But, we're going to focus mostly on dealing with the overwhelming feeling of having too many things that you want to accomplish.

As an ENTP, it's always tempting for me to keep expanding and connecting new dots together. ***So, one important tactic for actually finishing things is to consciously limit your scope.***

I have *other* tiny-books that explore more about how to live a good life. *This* one is specifically about using productivity & psychology techniques to finally finish your todo items.

Ready for some specific tactics?

Here we go.

The basics: not *one* todo list but *three*

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Write down all ideas

- **Write down all your random ideas throughout the day** (try a simple bulleted list in Notion or a Google Doc; or, a simple todo-style app like Trello or Asana).
- **Write down *everything*—get it all out of your head to create spaciousness**, so it doesn't feel like you have to hold tight to your precious ideas or risk losing them.
- Throughout this process, you'll be creating several separate lists. We'll call this first one your "**Rough List.**"

Review regularly, and use multiple lists

The key thing here is to **create space between when you write the thing down and when you review it.** More space means you'll be more objective.

At the end of the day (or every few days, or even once a week), review your Rough List with fresh eyes. For every single item, do one of the following:

1. **Discard it** (it was fun to think about, but it's not truly worth spending your time on);
2. **Move to a "Someday List"** (which you'll honestly probably never do anything with, and that *has* to be ok—because **you only have a limited amount of time to be alive, so you can't do everything**);
3. For only a small percentage of these items, **move them to an "Active List," which *must* be handwritten on paper** (to force you to keep it short).

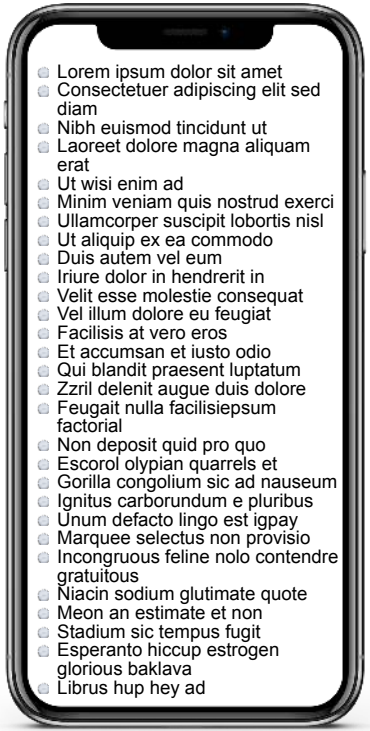
Remember: **The more items on your Active List, the less likely they are to get done.** Practice discarding (or moving to a Someday List) as many items as you can.

Again: **You *think* you're being more awesome and successful and productive by putting *more* things on your Active List, but that's a trap.** The opposite is true.

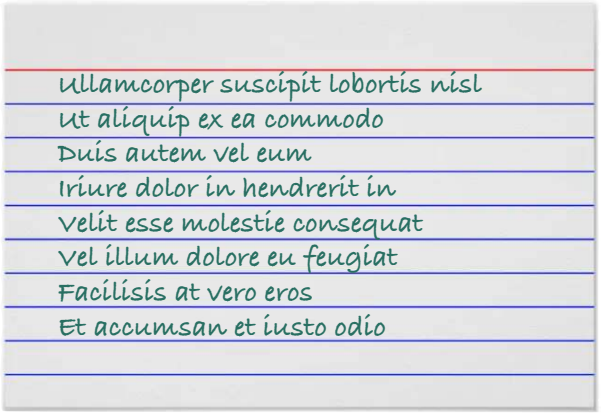
What's *most* important?

- Now, create your most important list: your Tomorrow List. You'll make a new one every single day.
- **Before bed, look at your Active List and pick out the top 3-5 items you'd like to accomplish *tomorrow*.** (Honestly, 5 is pushing it. In fact, I suggest starting with just *one* until you can do that successfully every day for at least a week.)
- Write these on a small **index card** or **sticky note** to (a) make it easily accessible, (b) force you to keep it brief.
- Important: Break the items down small enough so they're each **doable in no more than a few hours (ideally 30 minutes or less).**
- In the morning, **you *must* start your day with one of those items.** Don't let someone else's priorities (e.g., from a new email or text message) take priority over yours. **In your morning routine, I suggest holding off on checking email, texts, or social media for as long as possible. Just one of those can totally derail you, so do *your* top priority *first*.**
- To reiterate, there are three separate lists: **Rough/Someday** (everything), **Active** (soon, actual priority), **Tomorrow** (1-5 items max). For reference, I personally have 500+ items on my Rough List, 10-20 on my Active List, and three on my Tomorrow List.

Here's what it looks like



Rough/Someday ("Big") List



Active ("Medium") List

Tomorrow ("Small") List

You have some options

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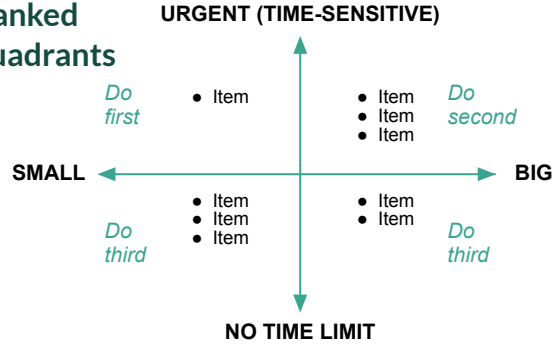
Important tips

- Looking at your Tomorrow List, start your day with: (**1**) the **hardest** item, (**2**) the one you've been **putting off longest**, or (**3**) the one that feels **most aligned** with your life mission / current big goal.
- Finished your entire Tomorrow List? Allow yourself to **relax**, **take a break**, and **celebrate** your accomplishment. **You *must* consider your day successful even if you do *nothing* else.** This falls apart if you beat yourself up for not doing even *more*.
- At the end of the day, **move any unfinished items either to tomorrow's list** (rewrite them each time they move) **or back to the Active List** to be reconsidered in the future.
- **If your Active List grows beyond an index card,** move the lowest item back to the Rough List.
- **Don't beat yourself up if you fail. But tomorrow, start with an even smaller list.** If you have to, write down only one single thing for a while until you consistently finish it daily.
- To the right, you'll find several different ways of organizing your Active List. I periodically alternate between those when I get bored with one system.

Simple index cards

Ranked quadrants



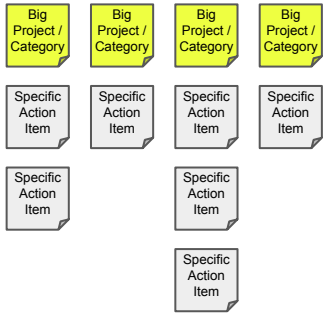
Visualize the tasks by project/category

STEP 1: Put up a sticky note (or use Trello) for up to 5 major projects or categories you want to focus on for a while.

STEP 2: Break that down into specific action items. Each should be doable in a couple of hours or less (ideally 30min).

STEP 3: Arrange them in priority or logical sequential order from top to bottom underneath their parent project / category.

STEP 4: When you feel drawn toward that project / category, grab the top-most action item.



Wait, how can you only do one thing per day?

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I've suggested that your daily todo list (your Tomorrow List) contain only a single item (the #1 most important thing).

And, I've said that you can eventually work up to perhaps 3-5 items per day.

So, you might be asking: How can you actually get through life like that?

In any given day, you have to shower, brush your teeth, make lunch, drive to work, make dinner, etc. That's way more than one thing!

There are two answers here.

First, if you truly pick the #1 most important thing with the biggest possible ROI (return on investment of time/energy), it'll have a huge impact on your day.

You'll be far better off completing that single amazing thing versus ten trivial things.

Imagine if your single #1 thing is taking the first step toward creating the business you've been dreaming of for years, or taking the first step toward finally moving across the country, or writing the first chapter of the novel you've had in your head for a decade.

Doing that will very likely energize you, and you'll have an easier time going through the rest of your day.

But even if that doesn't happen—even if the rest of the day is a complete dud—you'll still have accomplished something super important.

In any case, I'm not saying that your day is over after you complete your #1 thing—simply that you're aiming to accomplish something highly important as early in the day as possible.

And after that, you can try to fit in other things too, but you'll have already accomplished the most important thing. So, don't beat yourself up if you don't accomplish ten more things that day.

Second, I differentiate todo items from habits and routines (except perhaps when you're first forming a new habit).

I'm a big believer in fixed morning routines that you do the same way every single day. That might include things like showering, making breakfast, and meditating.

(continued on next page)

Wait, how can you only do one thing per day? (cont'd)

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So, that series of "morning routine" activities wouldn't belong on your todo list. Instead, you might use a paper calendar and put an X every day you successfully do your morning routine.

However, let's say you're starting a new morning meditation practice for the first time. In that case, you might want to make it your #1 or #2 most important todo item for several days to ensure you really lock it in.

Here's another way to think about all this:

First, figure out your most precious time of day, when you feel you have the most energy available.

For me, it's 8am-10am. So, the question is: During those precious two hours, what is the single most important thing I could do?

If you had to just pick one thing that would do the most for your life or reduce the most pain, what would it be?

I guarantee that it won't be checking your email or some other mundane task. And it probably shouldn't be a task for someone else. It should ideally be arising from deep inside you, related to your big goals or life purpose.

That said, it can also be the things you've been beating yourself up over for a while.

So, if you've been putting off scheduling that dentist appointment for weeks, perhaps it should become your #1 most important thing tomorrow.

Finally, be strategic about how you spend your time:

If you only have fifteen minutes available, perhaps the best use of that time is making the dentist appointment or paying that bill that's been sitting on the counter for three weeks.

But if you have a three-hour block of time available, it's more ideal to not waste your limited motivation energy on the dentist appointment, and to instead work on something more meaningful, like starting to write your novel.

Warning: Be careful about telling yourself that you'll "just quickly do the small less important thing first, and then you'll get to the big important one after."

Your motivation might not last that long, so start with the important one instead.

If 1 thing feels too limiting, try 3—but 3 *specific* types of thing

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It's reasonable that just accomplishing a single thing might not feel like enough. So, you can try this instead.

Every day, aim to accomplish 3 things, 1 each from the following 3 categories (and each of which is broken down small enough to be doable in 30 minutes or less):

1. ***One thing to get you closer to your dream, life purpose, or big goal*** (e.g., writing a chapter of your book, creating music, working on the website for the business you want to start, researching grad schools to apply to)

2. ***One annoying bureaucratic/logistic/chore thing*** (e.g., scheduling a doctor's appointment, submitting an expense report, dropping off an Amazon return, cleaning the bathroom)

3. ***One act of self-care, connection, service, or spirituality*** (e.g., taking a bath, going to the gym, calling a friend, meditating, trying a new meetup event, supporting a family member who's struggling)

Each of those things should be something that ***you*** are choosing to do—not something ***someone else*** has asked you for (though #2 might be something that your partner or someone else would like you to do too).

Instead of worrying about a todo list with twenty things on it, make a small list every day with only three things: one from each of those categories.

Many of my smart, ambitious N-type clients get stuck here.

As an ENTP, I know exactly what it's like to struggle with never-ending ideas and unfinished projects. ***How can you possibly pick just 1-3 things?!***

I get it. And, I'm a Transformation Coach & Existential Counselor who specializes in N's like you—I've helped hundreds all over the world.

Together, let's identify what's truly most important, and help you take action on your highest-leverage items—so you'll feel less stuck, more deeply fulfilled, and more aligned with your purpose and potential.

Book Your Free Sample Session

(no commitment, and not just a "discovery call" like other coaches—I'll give you actual coaching on a real challenge you're facing)

How time factors in

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When to do something immediately

- **If you think of something that will take two minutes or less, just do it immediately**—don't add it to a list. But, if your day gets filled with tiny tasks like that, group them and add them to your Active List instead. Remember that the goal is to focus on what's *actually* most important, not what's most recent or what someone else asked you to do.
- **When deciding what to work on, follow what feels most alive for you.** Sure, sometimes you need to do things that aren't fun. But, for the most part, when you're looking down your Active List, pick out things that feel most relevant to what you care about right now in life. Where do you feel your energy drawn? **It's perfectly normal if this changes day to day** and what felt exciting yesterday is less so today.
- **Similarly, strike while the iron is hot. Notice when you feel inspired and energized**—maybe it's while you're listening to a song or out on a bike ride. Notice especially when you feel inspired toward a specific thing, like if you were just talking with a friend, and they complained about a problem that one of your projects is seeking to solve. Great! **Don't add that to your todo list. Just start work on it *right now*, as soon as you leave your friend.** (That's how I managed to finish most of this tiny-book—after leaving a session with a client struggling with something related to idea/todo overwhelm, it would inspire me to come back here and write more.)

Dealing with deadlines

- If you have a task with a specific due date (e.g., a deadline to sign up for a class), don't add it to your Active List. Instead, **create a calendar reminder for the due date** (ask Siri / Google Assistant to make it even easier), then set it to remind you a day before, a week before, or however long you need to get that thing done before the deadline. When the reminder pops up, add it to your Tomorrow List.
- If that thing is complex (e.g., "finish tax return by April 15th"), you might have to add it to your Active List as well and break it into several pieces. Then, **pull a piece onto your Tomorrow List every day for several days or weeks leading up to the deadline.**

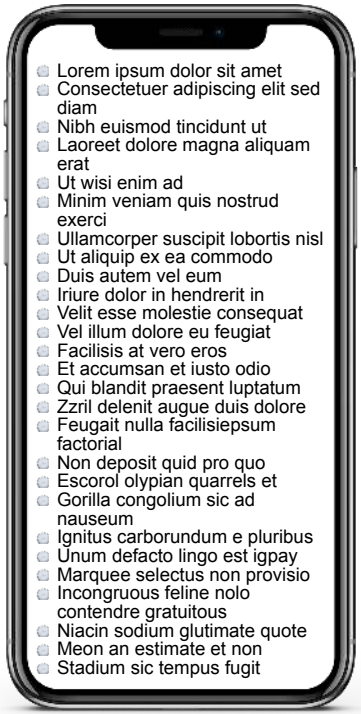
Using the right tool for the job

- It often makes sense to use a more specific tool for certain types of "todos." For example, don't just mix "try Restaurant X" in with all your other todos on your Active List. Instead, **make a new Notion/Evernote/Asana/whatever list devoted to restaurants you want to try** (maybe even kept in prioritized order); or, **save those in Google Maps** so that you can easily see all of them on the map.

"People think focus means saying yes to the thing you've got to focus on. But that's not what it means at all. It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas that there are." —Steve Jobs

Here's what all this looks like

Empty your brain into your Rough List



Looking back at the idea later with fresh eyes, delete it if it doesn't feel as alive to you anymore

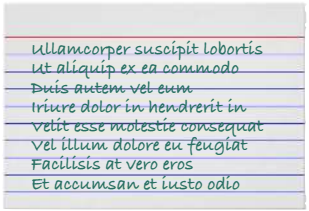
Otherwise, leave it in the Rough List or move it to a Someday List, unless…

If it has a true deadline (most things don't), set a calendar reminder

Then, on that day…

Move only a few items to your Tomorrow List. If you don't finish, rewrite them the next day

Or, if you want to prioritize it, move it to your Active List



This is designed for specific types of people

Why does this "productivity system" work so well for ENTP's and INTP's in particular?

For ENTP's, it's critical that you feel freedom—like you're not being micromanaged.

True freedom means being able to spend your time and energy how you choose to. But, if you constantly have a nagging voice in your head reminding you of all the things you're procrastinating on, you won't be able to feel that freedom.

True freedom also requires operating within reality. You need to make sure that important things get done so that you won't be suddenly interrupted by deadlines that you'd been ignoring.

Life is so complicated nowadays that you can't just rely on your memory. ***You need to get everything out of your head, then prioritize it so that you're focusing on a small number of things—the ones that matter most right now.***

You can still bounce around between different types of tasks throughout the day, and you can still aim to work on a large number of your ideas *someday*.

But the key here is that you're keeping your focus limited for the short- and medium-terms so that you actually *finish* things.

This might seem counterintuitive (especially for NP types), but imposing some structure is what will allow you to feel true freedom. For example, by limiting the size of your Tomorrow List, you'll actually *finish* what's on it, which will free you up from that nagging voice telling you that you're always a bad procrastinator.

For INTP's, it's critical that you feel like what you're doing makes logical sense.

The approach I've been describing in this tiny-book is grounded in logic and rationality. Plus, it layers on intuition too since prioritizing the items in your life is also highly subjective (i.e., it can't be 100% rooted in logic alone).

This sense of intuition is a muscle you'll develop over time as you practice picking which specific item you're most drawn to work on in the moment.

Ultimately though, as long as you're consistently doing *anything* from your Tomorrow or Active Lists, you should be in good shape to overcome procrastination and begin getting things done.

This requires a substantial mindset shift

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If you're a different personality type (like an ISTJ or ENTJ), it might be possible to actually finish *everything* on your todo lists (even your Rough/Someday list).

For everyone else—especially NP types—that's not realistic.

And that's not a bad thing. ***It's just that your mind is wired differently.***

Your mind is oriented around expanding ever outward rather than focusing down. That's wonderful in so many ways.

But it also means you're simply never going to be someone who's a master of Inbox Zero (consistently at least).

So if you're a fellow NP (or other type that doesn't naturally gravitate toward completion), here are some hard truths.

I mentioned some of these before, but I'm reiterating now because it's so important for you to deeply understand these—despite how much resistance you'll feel.

But the sooner you accept these instead of fighting against them, the more effective and less stressed you'll be:

- You're never going to finish *all the ideas* you want to finish, and that's ok. You won't even finish *most* of them.
- You're never going to finish *all* your todos on *all* your todo lists. Not even close. (Seriously, across all my abandoned todo lists, I literally have *thousands* of items that I never finished, and nothing really bad happened.)
- You're never going to do *every* project and *every* career you've been interested in. It's ridiculously impossible!
- For the rest of your life, you're constantly going to be adding to your pile of things that *sound* fun but you're never going to do. That's simply part of being human. There are so many possible things out there to think about, visit, and try.
- You can't do them all. But, you *CAN and WILL* do *some* of them.
- And for the rest, if you keep putting something off, perhaps it's time to finally admit to yourself that you're just never going to do it. Make peace with that. ***Most things don't actually need to get done/read/watched/etc.***

Quotes from an excellent article I didn't write

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From Oliver Burkeman:

"All the books on your bedside table, all those bookmarks in your browser, or articles saved to Instapaper – all of them seem like they might be right up your street, or crucial to your professional success, or might contain some nugget of wisdom you'd benefit from absorbing. The problem, as the critic Nicholas Carr explained, isn't filter failure. It's filter success.

…For example, the reading recommendations I encounter via Twitter are much more tailored to my concerns than those I might encounter via a newspaper, because I choose who I follow on Twitter; it's like having a thousand assistants scouring the infoverse for whatever might pique my interest…

To return to information overload: ***this means treating your 'to read' pile like a river (a stream that flows past you, and from which you pluck a few choice items, here and there) instead of a bucket (which demands that you empty it).***

After all, you presumably don't feel overwhelmed by all the unread books in the British Library – and not because there aren't an overwhelming number of them, but because it never occurred to you that it might be your job to get through them all.

Coming at life this way definitely entails tough choices. But it's liberating, too, as you slowly begin to grasp that you never had any other option. There's no point beating yourself up for failing to clear a backlog (of unread books, undone tasks, unrealized dreams) that it was always inherently unfeasible to clear in the first place."

What about using this at work?

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Applying this system for your job too

- Just like with your personal life, you can create three separate lists: **Rough/Someday**, **Active**, **Tomorrow**.
- **Before leaving the office** (or logging off at home), make your Tomorrow List, and **identify the #1 most important thing you want to accomplish tomorrow** (doable in a couple hours or less).
- The next morning, you're going to be tempted to check your work email/Slack/etc. right away, and you'll be even more tempted to act on a new request that's appeared in your email.
- **This is the most likely point of failure, so be careful:** There are three main reasons you might be tempted to do that new thing instead of the top thing on your Tomorrow List:
    1. **You get a little dopamine hit by checking your email and seeing new messages appear.** Subconsciously, it might make you feel important: People want your attention!
    2. Because of the recency bias, it's easy to imagine that **something new is more urgent or more important.**
    3. Since those messages are coming from someone else, **you're drawn to please them.** It feels more important to complete someone else's request than to do the thing that you yourself identified as important.

Overcoming those issues

- **Do your #1 thing from your Tomorrow List as soon as you start work.** Ideally, do it before checking your messages. Or, if you feel like it's critical to check them, give yourself only five minutes to do a quick pass for anything truly urgent. (And, **keep a simple journal for yourself logging how often there turned out to really be something urgent.**)
- Sure, things can change quickly in the business world, but **is this new thing truly more important than what you decided a mere 16 hours ago was the #1 thing?** The most effective people (and companies) don't allow their priorities to be constantly shuffled. Yes, it's important to be nimble and adaptive, but you can do that at the scale of days and weeks, not minutes and hours.
- **You can't let other people's requests overpower your #1 priority.** Think about a person you admire a lot—**would they continually let other people's requests take precedence over their own?**
- Remember that other people will always *say* that their thing is very important. Of course it's important to *them*, but does it have to be just as important to *you*?
- And **even if the request is coming from your manager, will they be happy if you keep putting off all your other important things?** Are they even fully aware of everything you have on your plate, and are they aware of the loss of productivity you feel by constantly switching between tasks?

What about using this at work? (continued)

MICHAEL CALOZ
COACHING FOR FULL-STACK HUMANS

Dealing with new requests

- When someone asks you for something new, tell them, "**Sure, I'll be happy to get to that once I finish an important task I've already prioritized. If all goes well, I should be able to get to this new task later today** [or whenever]."
- Once you've committed to *your* important task, focus on *finishing* it instead of pausing periodically to check your email again, get yet another new task, and devote even more brain power to deciding which thing to focus on. **Just completely finish your #1 thing, *then* move on to something else.** This will probably be hard at first since you'll have to break your habit of task switching.
- **This is one reason it's important to make your Tomorrow List tasks small and doable within a few hours**—that way, if someone brings you an urgent task, they don't have to wait too long. Worst case, you'll be able to get to their task in a few hours.
- **Unless you're in a truly life-or-death profession like doctor or firefighter, almost *anything* should be able to wait a few hours.** Ask yourself: Worst case, what will truly happen here if you delay three hours? And, how likely is that worst case, really?

Asking for help

- If you feel overwhelmed—like it feels impossible to meet some deadline, finish everything on your todo list, or even know where to start—**ask for help**. Here's what I suggest:
- Take some time to put your Active List in priority order as best you can. You might even add some extra details to each item: **which project it's for, who requested it**, and **how big it is** (i.e., how much of your time/energy it will take to complete).
- Then, present your list to your manager and ask for guidance: **Is your order right? Would they like you to adjust anything?** This has three main benefits:
    1. It allows them to either **agree on your priority order or adjust it for you.**
    2. It ensures you two are **on the same page about the rough sizing of tasks** (e.g., they might see that you marked something as "large" when they thought it would be "small," so now you can have a conversation to align on the proper scope of work).
    3. **It shows them how hard you're working** and **gives them advance notice** if something looks likely to fall off.

- **You might be worried that asking for help this way will make you look weak or incompetent**, but that's far from the truth.
- I've both managed people myself and coached high-level managers. And I can say that any good manager will happily welcome more info about what you're dealing with.
- **By letting them in, you're doing them a favor** by giving them the opportunity to help you not burn out or miss an important deadline (and, if you do end up missing a deadline, they'll understand why).
- If you think your manager really doesn't care about you, **it's reasonable to ask to be transferred or to look for a new job.** Your manager's main job is supposed to be helping you succeed and flourish (which should benefit the company too).

The 5 core principles of this system (print this out!)

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COACHING FOR FULL-STACK HUMANS

Use three separate lists: Rough/Someday (big) —> Active (medium) —> Tomorrow (small): To avoid being overwhelmed, you should spend most of your time looking at your smallest list of only a few items.

Saying no allows you to say YES: You have trouble finishing things right? The only solution is to say no to most things—to decide that you're not going to prioritize most of the ideas that pop into your head. That way, you'll actually be able to finish the smaller number of things that matter. It's because you think you can do *everything* that you can't finish *anything*.

Keep commitments small: Break things down into chunks that can be completed in 30 minutes or less. Then, allow yourself to stop or take a break. Count that as a success even if you don't do any more that day. If you're thinking, "but that's not enough, I have to do more," imagine how productive you'll be if you just finish your #1 thing *every single day*.

Prioritize yourself: We're constantly bombarded by "shoulds" and requests from other people, from work, from advertising, etc. Most of where you spend your energy should be on things that *you* care about, not other people. (That said, if you're in a committed partnership, it's also important to regularly prioritize what's important to *them*.)

Work on what's most important when you're at your best: Find the time of day or set of circumstances under which you're at peak energy and focus. Then, spend that time on what's most important to *you*. Don't give that precious time to your job unless that's truly what feels most important at this point in your life.

The practical details

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Here's a step-by-step guide for getting started with all this:

1. **At the beginning, we're only going to worry about accomplishing a single thing each day.** Don't commit to more than that until you've successfully completed your one thing every single day for at least 1-2 weeks. (**At that point, you can add a second thing**, then eventually a third, with five per day being the absolute limit to aim for.)
2. **Your "#1 most important thing" should be small enough and simple enough to fit on a sticky note.** If you don't have sticky notes, cut a piece of paper into pieces.
3. **Put your stack of sticky notes (or pieces of paper) and pen on your pillow.** That way, you'll be forced to move them before you can go to bed. But, **you're not allowed to remove them from your pillow until you write down your #1 most important thing for tomorrow.** In the morning, put the sticky note stack back on your pillow for tonight.
4. **Your #1 thing must be doable in 30 minutes or less.** When it's time to begin, set a timer for 30 minutes. **When it dings (or if you finish before that), you're allowed to stop.** Or, if you still feel excited or committed, you can keep going beyond 30 minutes. But, the key thing is that you don't *have* to. **You have to allow yourself to consider it a success that you just did 30 minutes.** If you didn't finish in that time, make this your #1 thing for tomorrow (or later today).
5. In any case, when you finish your thing, **take a few moments to celebrate.** This sounds stupid but it's important. Close your eyes and affirm to yourself that you did the thing. You are someone who completes things. **You are not someone who never finishes. You did it. You're literally rewiring your brain here.** This is important.
6. For your #1 thing, choose something that's been poking at your mind for a while now, or something that you've been wanting to do but you keep telling yourself "maybe someday." Either way, **don't let someone else tell you that their thing is more important than yours.** Your thing is only going to take 30 minutes or less, so worst case you can get to *their* thing in half an hour.
7. **Decide what time of day you're most likely to be successful at completing your #1 thing.** For me, I always do it immediately after showering and meditating in the morning. For you, it might be during your lunch break. **The key is to do it consistently at the same time every day.** If you can't do it at your usual time, do it as soon as you get home from work or otherwise ASAP.
8. **If you miss it one day, don't beat yourself up.** But, resolve to do it tomorrow no matter what—even if you have to do it at midnight. **Don't miss two days in a row.**

Here's how your journey might look over time

PHASE 1: For the first 1-2 weeks, I strongly encourage choosing just one important thing per day. Once you're able to consistently complete it every single day without fail, move on to Phase 2.

PHASE 2: For another 1-2 weeks, you can add a "stretch task"—a second-most-important thing that you'll work on *only* if you finish the first one. Once you're successfully completing both items most days, move on to Phase 3.

PHASE 3: At this point, your Tomorrow List can have up to 5 important things per day (remember that your Active List can still have more than that). Rewrite any you don't complete on the following day's list.

It's critical that you limit yourself to 5 and never pull in additional items from your Active List. If seeing 5 things begins to feel overwhelming, scale back to 2-3 for a while until that feels comfortable.

PHASE 4: I'm going to be real with you: It might take months or even years to get here. You've probably spent a lot of your life thinking of yourself as a procrastinator, so that can't change overnight. You're going to have to rewire your brain to convince your subconscious that things are different now. It's very possible, but it will take work.

Every day you complete your most important thing, your new neural pathway becomes stronger. And once it's strong enough, it will feel more natural to go down that new pathway than the old one that you've been forcing to wither away.

When you do eventually arrive at Phase 4, getting through your "most important" list will simply feel like the natural thing your body does. You'll barely have to work at it. Of course, you'll still stumble sometimes too, but that's just a part of being human.

All of that has been my experience—ups and downs, but mostly ups. This system is what allowed me to write this entire tiny-book. I hope that it will allow you to accomplish similar things that inspire you—things that feel truly, deeply important.

Here's some more support for skill-building

MICHAEL CALOZ
COACHING FOR FULL-STACK HUMANS

This stuff isn't easy. *It might make sense in theory but feel hard to consistently put into practice.*

I get it. And, I'm a Transformation Coach & Existential Counselor who specializes in N's like you —I've helped hundreds all over the world.

So, why not get some support that's totally customized to you?

Book Your Free Sample Session

(no commitment, and not just a "discovery call" like other coaches—I'll give you actual *coaching on a real challenge you're facing)*

Or, check out these free videos:

No, You're Not "Lazy" — Here's the Real Reason You Procrastinate

How to Manage Your Time When You Don't Have a Boss (so you don't just waste the day)

Keep Overcommitting Yourself to People, Events, or Projects? Here Are 4 Powerful Strategies To Help

You're Doing Perfectionism Wrong—The Hidden Trap of "False Perfection"

Stop Debating Your Habits: The Key to Real Consistency (For ENTPs & INTPs Especially)

Want to Boost Motivation, Clarity, and Freedom? Ditch Your Todo Lists (Maybe)!

Part 2:
More advanced techniques

What should your “most important thing” be?

MICHAEL CALOZ
COACHING FOR FULL-STACK HUMANS

At the beginning, you'll probably have a backlog of annoying bureaucratic things you've been putting off.

But, after a while, ***your #1 thing should become something that excites you***—starting an art project, reaching a certain number of push-ups, practicing an instrument, or finishing the website for your new small business.

I’m not saying it’s easy to figure out what excites you. In fact, what we’re really getting at here is one of the core questions of being human: ***How do you want to be spending your time each day? If nobody were telling you what you had to be doing, how would you choose to spend your life?***

That’s where your life purpose and mission statement come in. Those are beyond the scope of this tiny-book, but here’s my step-by-step guide for N types to clearly define their purpose and find their ideal career path. For now, here are two ways to start:

1. Begin to build deep self-knowledge by ***prioritizing a daily meditation practice***. Here’s my free 7-day guided series based on my 14 years of practice (I was a big skeptic at first too).
2. Ask yourself: ***"In my opinion, what are the top three problems the world (or my community) is facing, and why aren’t I working on one of them?”*** (These don’t have to be the largest-scale problems like solving world hunger. Think about where you’re best suited to help.)

While you’re working toward your life purpose, here’s a worthwhile goal for now: ***to reduce the sense of overwhelm and self-judgment you feel around procrastinating.***

From now on, if you’ve been putting something off, you have two choices: Either (a) add it to your Tomorrow/Active Lists or (b) decide that you’re not going to do it (at least for, say, the next year).

That’s it. Those are the only two choices (and that second choice is totally ok!).

Don’t keep things in a nebulous, wishy-washy “maybe I’ll do this next week” place. Don’t keep them in your head without writing them down.

Ask yourself:

What's truly the most important thing you'd love to get done tomorrow, and what’s the first step toward that?

What would take the biggest load off your shoulders or give you the biggest feeling of satisfaction, pride, or inspiration?

Learning to rely on your intuitive knowing

Here's one reason I make meditation the first thing I do each morning (after showering and brushing my teeth):

Often, while meditating, I'll literally observe my mind sorting out my priorities on its own.

It's not a logical, analytical negotiation. Instead, it's more like watching puzzle pieces trying out different orientations until they naturally fit into place.

If you're new to meditation, it probably won't work that way for a while. But I urge you to keep practicing until you get there.

In the meantime, you might have a hard time choosing what to move from your Active List to your Tomorrow List, or which item from your Tomorrow List to do first.

If so, consider the following questions:

QUESTION #1: *Do I feel incredibly inspired or energized about one of these—like I want to pour my creative energy into it and I have something big on the "tip of my tongue" ready to be expressed? Like I'll lose something if I don't act on it quickly?*

If so, select that item. Otherwise:

QUESTION #2: *Even if I'm drawn to one of these, does it feel like I'll still be equally willing to do it an hour from now? In contrast, is there another item that feels just barely doable right now, but if I put it off I know I won't feel able to do it anymore later?*

If so, select that item. Otherwise:

QUESTION #3: *Which of these is most likely to shift my state if I complete it? Which one, if I finish it, will make me feel energized to continue on to another one? Or, on the opposite side, is there one that will make me feel more depressed or anxious if I don't finish it soon?*

Look out for little nudges & boosts from your life

MICHAEL CALOZ
COACHING FOR FULL-STACK HUMANS

A regular mindfulness practice is useful for another reason too:

To train yourself to notice when life presents you with opportunities.

If something has been on your todo list for a long time, it begins to feel stagnant.

Dead.

It becomes easy to put it off again and again.

… Until one day, something happens in your life that relates to that todo item.

You get some kind of nudge in its direction. Perhaps someone says something that reminds you of it.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, new life is breathed into that task.

It feels alive again. But not for long.

You must seize that opportunity before the life drains out of it again.

For example, this tiny-book has been a work-in-progress for years. I have a long list of ideas for new sections I could add.

But each of those ideas is just a small snippet. Fleshing them all out feels like too much work, so I don't prioritize it.

Then, once in a while, I'll receive an email from one of my readers. They'll offer me a suggestion that reminds me of one of the snippets on my list.

There's my chance to flesh it out!

Or, the reader might ask me a question. And instead of writing the answer in an email, I can update this tiny-book with a new section containing the answer and send them that instead.

It's amazing how little it takes to re-energize me—to make a dead, stale idea suddenly feel alive and easily accessible.

Similarly, some of my best videos and pieces of writing have come out of topics I just explored in a coaching session with a client.

The trick is to seize these kinds of opportunities as soon as possible.

For example, I'll try to begin writing or recording *immediately* after my client session ends, while the idea still feels clear and energizing in my mind.

(continued on next page)

Look out for little nudges & boosts from your life (cont'd)

Another example: Perhaps you've been meaning to try out entrepreneurship for years, but it's never felt like the right time.

Suddenly, you're laid off from your day-job. Perhaps that's exactly the push you needed to finally start your own business.

Another example: Say you just read in the news that Google is changing their search algorithm.

Perhaps you've been meaning to update your website for a while now, and this is just the little push you needed to update it, now with the new algorithm in mind.

To summarize, there are two core skills to develop here:

First, the mindfulness and open-mindedness to ***notice when these little nudges and boosts appear in your life.***

And second, the ability to ***seize those opportunities and take action immediately, before the energy fades.***

Using the “Relative Sizing” technique from Agile

MICHAEL CALOZ
COACHING FOR FULL-STACK HUMANS

How to use relative sizing

- In Agile, a philosophy/methodology used at virtually all the top tech companies, one of the most useful (though often misunderstood) concepts is **task sizing—figuring out how long something is likely to take.** There are whole books written about this, but I’m going to summarize the most useful part: the technique of “relative sizing.”
- Imagine you were tasked with grouping several dozen dogs according to weight. The dogs refused to sit still, so you couldn’t precisely weigh them. What could you do? **Well, based on just watching them from afar, you might begin to define three general buckets with a representative dog in each:** Chihuahuas would be “small,” Labradors would be “medium,” and Great Danes would be “large.”
- Now, here’s how relative sizing works. When sizing things, it’s much harder to ask, “Exactly how big is X?” and much easier to ask, “Is X more like A, B, or C?” So, instead of having to weigh every single dog, you simple compare each one to your three representative dogs: **Is this new dog closest to a Chihuahua, a Labrador, or a Great Dane?** This way, you can quickly assign the label “small,” “medium,” or “large” to every animal.
- Once you’ve categorized all the dogs, **you can quickly calculate their rough total weight by just weighing your three representative dogs.** For example, if the Chihuahua weighs 5 lbs, then all 6 “small” dogs together would be around 30 lbs (5 x 6).

S

M

L

Now, apply that to the tasks on your todo list

- Let’s say you decide the following. Doing the dishes is your representative “small” task and it takes you around 15 minutes. Writing a blog post is your “medium” task and it takes you 1 day. And building a portfolio website is your “large” task and takes you 2 weeks.
- When you go through your todo list, you can ask yourself: **Is this task more like doing the dishes, writing a blog post, or building a website** (or whatever your three representative tasks are)? Then, you can assign it S for small, M for medium, or L for large.
- This way, you can estimate that in a single afternoon you’ll very roughly be able to complete, say, several S tasks, half an M task, or a piece of an L task.
- (If you like, you can add even more granularity too with XS, XXS, XL, XXL. But I strongly suggest starting simple and keeping it that way for a while.)

Using the "Relative Sizing" technique from Agile (cont'd)

MICHAEL CALOZ
COACHING FOR FULL-STACK HUMANS

Predicting when you'll get to something

- Now here's the cool part. Remember that you know roughly how long each size task takes you (e.g., a "large" task takes 2 weeks). **If you have a prioritized task list, you can use that sizing information to predict when you'll reach a certain number on that list.**
- For this to work though, **you have to move through your todo list in order from top to bottom.** So, this will likely make more sense for your todo list at work (since the priority order there is probably stricter than on your personal one).
- **Caution: Remember that all this estimation is rough. This is not the technique to use for making exact predictions.** But, rough estimation actually makes more sense for most tasks unless you've done them many times before. Humans are bad estimators.
- For something unpredictable like software development (or all sorts of things), **offering a more precise estimate can give a false sense of security.** Rather than saying "this will take exactly 37 hours," it's much more realistic to say "well, this looks similar to that task I did a month ago that took a week, so this might also take around a week."

Putting this into practice

- Take a look at the example list to the right (and remember that our example S size is 15 minutes, M is 1 day, and L is 2 weeks).
- **Now, what if your manager or stakeholder asked you when you'll be able to get to item #5?**
- Well, before #5, you'll have to finish one S task, two M tasks, and one L task. So, adding together 1 x 15min + 2 x 1day + 1 x 2weeks = roughly 2 weeks and 2 days.
- **That's valuable information for your manager and stakeholders to know.** Now their expectations will be properly set, and they can ask you to move item #5 up in priority if 2 weeks and 2 days is too long to wait.

Prioritized todo list:

1. **(S)** Do something
2. **(M)** Do something
3. **(M)** Do something
4. **(L)** Do something
5. **(S)** Do something
6. **(M)** Do something

Using “Strategic Stacking” to manage your energy

MICHAEL CALOZ
COACHING FOR FULL-STACK HUMANS

- You might have several challenging, annoying things on your Active List. **It’s ok to not go for the #1 hardest one first.**
- Don’t beat yourself up for starting with, say, the #3 hardest one. Sometimes, just **contemplating doing #1 can make #2 or #3 seem not so bad.** So feel free to take advantage of how doable #3 suddenly seems in that moment.
- After all, if you’ve been putting off all three, getting that list down to two still leaves you in better shape!
- In fact, I like to think of this as Strategic Stacking. **We can rate each todo item across three components:**

#1: Energy Required

- For NP types especially, **this is more important than “time required.”**
- If you only have a little energy, you won’t be able to accomplish something that requires more.
- Energy certainly has a physical tiredness component—if you’re exhausted, the best course of action is usually to go to sleep early and try again in the morning.
- But, more often than not, **the real energy barrier tends to be mental and emotional.** Something might require a lot of energy if it’s either **ambitious** (e.g., making a big change in your life) or **annoying** (e.g., doing something you’ve been putting off).

#2: Subjective Importance

- How important is this item when ranked strictly by what living a good life means to you? **By its alignment with your life purpose, goals, and values?**
- The first layer of Strategic Stacking is combining #1 and #2 by identifying when in the day you have the most energy and then **starting with the most ambitious or annoying thing that’s important since that’s what will probably require the most energy.**
- Then, see how much energy you have left and try to fit in the *next* most important and highest-energy-requiring item.

#3: Orbit

- This is how “pulled” you are toward the item—how close it feels. Imagine you’re the sun with many different planets orbiting around you. Each orbit is different, and none is a perfect circle. **Depending on the day, each planet will be farther or closer in its orbit.**
- If a planet (i.e., todo item) feels “farther away” at the moment, it’ll require more energy to complete. But, if you wait, it might swing back around (often for reasons that are hard to define—it just feels different).
- Where an item is in its orbit depends on all sorts of variables—from your quality of sleep, to your mood, to what kinds of tasks you’ve been working on lately. **Because so many variables are at play, intuition works much better than strict logical analysis.**
- **The easiest way to build that muscle is through meditation.** Check in with yourself: Does this item feel close or far? Is now the right time? Are you pulled toward it, or should you wait for it to come around so it feels more approachable?

Let's try out Strategic Stacking

MICHAEL CALOZ
COACHING FOR FULL-STACK HUMANS

- **There's a proportional relationship between the three components:** Something important that's farther away in orbit will require more energy. And, something that's closer in orbit will require less energy, whether or not it's actually important.
- Let's check out three different important things I've been wanting to do for a while:

Todo #1: Make a dentist appointment

- **Energy required**: Low, since it's a simple process to look up my dentist's phone number on Google Maps and call them.
- **Subjective importance**: Somewhat high, since health is a core value of mine.
- **Orbit**: Fairly far away and wobbly—I hate logistical items like setting up appointments, so it often feels easy to put them off.
- **Verdict**: This needs to get done soon. Here are two ways I deal with items like this:
  1. Finish my higher-energy items first. Then, when I have just a small amount of energy left, ambitious/creative projects don't feel doable, but I have just enough juice left to push myself to do something small but annoying like this.
  2. Even if the orbit never seems close exactly, **I'll notice that some days it feels *very* far and some days just a *little* far. So, I'll put it off (in a gentle, intentional way) until one day I wake up and I notice that it seems just doable enough—like now's the time and it would be silly to put it off yet again.** I'll emphasize again that I put it off with *intentionality*, from a place of grounded wisdom, not a place of annoyance and pushing it away. I'm controlling *it*—it's not controlling *me* and causing me to beat myself up about putting it off.

Todo #2: Finish my next crypto blog post

- **Energy required**: More than the dentist appointment, but still pretty manageable since I have a lot of topic ideas.
- **Subjective importance**: Not terribly high since it's just a hobby.
- **Orbit**: It does feel pretty "alive" for me lately since my friends have been talking about crypto. But, compared to my other interests, this one definitely varies in orbit depending on the day.
- **Verdict**: Move to lower on my Active or Tomorrow list.

Todo #3: Start a new chapter in my book

- **Energy required**: The most by far since it feels like I'm starting from more of a blank page.
- **Subjective importance**: Very high since it's quite aligned with my life purpose (and, it might lead to more business).
- **Orbit**: This has been on my list for many years. This is kind of like the orbit of a tiny dark planet like Pluto that only comes around once in a while. So, I have to have all my sensors and telescopes pointed in its direction to detect when it's even slightly more available.
- **Verdict**: Look for any tiny sliver of inspiration or motivation. For example, if a coaching session with a client touches on a topic related to my book, I need to write down any new ideas immediately.

When you hit a snag, use “Grumpy Productivity”

Michael Caloz
Coaching for Full-Stack Humans

Another technique is to string together the “bad” things.

If you’re feeling down, it can be hard to motivate yourself to do something that requires inspiration, creativity, or innovation.

Those kinds of todos items require a kind of “brightness” in your energy, which might feel out of reach when you’re grumpy.

The trick is to embrace that grumpiness. If you’re already feeling annoyed, do something else that also ***feels annoying.***

When you’re in a bad mood, it’s the perfect time to do that nagging bureaucratic or logistical thing you’ve been putting off—scheduling the dentist, working on your taxes, cleaning your room, etc.

Here’s an example:

Say I’m feeling inspired to record a video for my new business. I download some video recording software, but it refuses to detect my webcam.

I try to troubleshoot, but nothing is working. My frustration rises—here I was with so much creative energy ready to go, but now I’m feeling all that drain away. I’m grumpy, and I don’t feel drawn to *any* of my projects anymore. I just want to watch YouTube or browse Reddit.

In this moment, I have three options:

1. ***Best case, I can find some way of helping myself feel better.*** Then, maybe I’ll eventually recover my motivation to record the video.
2. ***Worst case, I can feel sorry for myself and wallow in self-pity.*** I can beat myself up for failing or blame the world for being unfair. Then, I can distract myself by doing something mindless like watching YouTube.
3. ***I can use the Grumpy Productivity technique:*** When you’re feeling annoyed, instead of giving up and distracting yourself, find something else annoying to work on. (continued on the next page)

“Grumpy Productivity” in action

Here’s how it works:

1. Slow down, close your eyes, and take some deep breaths. ***Focus on feeling the breath in your body.***
2. ***Give yourself empathy:*** ”This is hard right now… I’m having a tough time… It makes sense that this doesn’t feel good…”
3. ***Carefully examine your energy.*** If you’re completely exhausted, you need some kind of physical state change: a nap, a walk, a shower, etc. If you’re *not* physically exhausted, ***check if there’s just a small “flickering flame” of energy available.*** Don’t expect a huge burst of motivation—look for just a sliver. Sometimes even that won’t be there, and that’s ok too.
4. Make an agreement with yourself: ***In situations like this, if even a sliver of motivation is available—a tiny, flickering flame in the dark—you must act on it.***
5. Be careful: If you try to do too much, you’ll just end up breaking your promise to yourself. Instead, since this is only a *sliver* of motivation, ***use it to do something small-but-annoying that you’ve been putting off.***

This only works if you’re real with yourself. ***If the flickering flame is there, act on it. And, sometimes it won’t be there, and that has to be ok.*** In that case, you’re allowed to just watch cat videos on YouTube.

But work to build this muscle so that you’re more easily able to find that tiny sliver of motivation inside you.

Notice also if you’re too hyper-focused on one specific thing you don’t want to do or that doesn’t feel possible.

Expand your awareness to see if you can find something that does ***feel possible in this moment*** —especially in a different “genre” (e.g., sending out business invoices, versus processing personal notes, versus doing the dishes).

Here’s an example combining Strategic Stacking with Grumpy Productivity:

I woke up this morning to bad weather and a grumpy mood. I quickly scanned through my in-progress projects in my head, and nothing felt appealing.

Then, as I was showering, the thought popped into my head that it’s been a while since I’ve updated my spreadsheet tracking my investments. Since we’ve been in a bear market (i.e., bad for investments), that’s felt like a dark cloud hanging over me, so I’ve been putting it off.

In other words, I knew that working on the spreadsheet would bring up unpleasant feelings, so I hadn’t wanted to ruin my good moods on other days by doing it.

Doing this spreadsheet was important, but the energy required was high, and it had felt *very* far away in orbit. But this morning in the shower, for whatever reason, I could feel the flickering flame of possibility. The orbit still wasn’t *close* exactly, but the planet was at least “visible” rather than in the distant darkness.

So I told myself, ***“If not now, then when?” And maybe I wouldn’t even*** finish ***it, but I’d at least start.***

To be even more efficient, try “Batching the Bad”

Here’s another technique in a similar vein to Grumpy Productivity:

Batching the things you find annoying.

In other words, ***when you’re going to try to do one annoying thing, see if you can do several at once*** (that are all part of the same category).

Why would you do this?

Because the energy required to do two similar annoying things is much less than what it would take to do each of them separately from scratch.

Examples:

- If you’re about to leave to run an annoying errand, check your todo list and see if there’s another errand you could run at the same time. Could you stop at two stores on the same trip?
- If you’re going to pay one bill, can you pay two instead?
- If you’re vacuuming one room, check how you feel when you finish. Does it feel doable to vacuum the adjacent room as well?
- If you’re cooking one meal, could you double the portions and freeze half for next time?
- Could you wait for multiple emails to pile up and then answer them all at once?

Careful: This isn’t a way of covertly putting pressure on yourself to do everything.

If you push yourself too hard, you’ll just end up burnt out.

All I’m saying is this:

While you’re already in the state of mind or physical location for doing one type of task, notice if continuing on to do an additional task of that kind feels much easier than it normally would.

If so, try to do it.

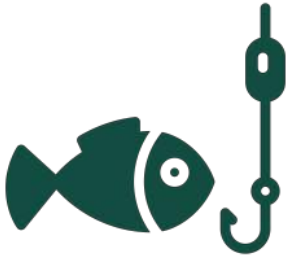
And if not, don’t beat yourself up.

One more technique: "Dangle Swap"

MICHAEL CALOZ
COACHING FOR FULL-STACK HUMANS

- Yes, I'm having fun making up these technique names 😆.
- Here's the deal with this one:
  1. When something doesn't feel doable, **make the decision to allow yourself to take a break to do something fun or mindless.** (In other words, dangle that new activity in front of yourself.)
  2. But, just before you actually switch to that new activity, **pause**.
  3. In that moment, **check if something else feels (just barely) doable**—whether it's the original thing you were trying to do, something else on your list, or even something new that pops into mind. (In other words, swap that break activity you were about to do for some small productive activity.)
  4. Don't force this. Just like with the flickering flame from earlier, it won't always be possible. But genuinely check here if something feels just a *little* doable. It can be helpful to **promise yourself that you'll truly be allowed to get to that break activity after you work just a little on something else.**
  5. The magic part is that, once you get going on that "something else," you might suddenly find the energy to keep going, and you won't even need to go back to that break activity. **But if you do need to go back to it, let that be ok. Don't just trick yourself here and break your promise of taking the break when you finish.**

- Put another way, you're asking yourself if something feels doable at multiple points along the way:
  1. When you notice you have free time, ask yourself: "Does hard-thing feel doable?"
  2. No? Ok, do easier-thing for a while instead.
  3. When you're at a stopping point, ask again: "Does hard-thing feel doable?"
  4. No, you're low energy? That's ok, let's take a break.
  5. Begin the process of taking a break (e.g., save and close what you were working on, or take out your headphones, or get a snack, or open up YouTube but don't actually start a video)… Then, just when you're about to really do the break activity, ask yourself: "Does hard-thing feel doable? Even just a little? Even just a piece?"
  6. Ok, take the break.
  7. Then, ask again: "How about now?"
  8. No? Ok, do something else.



One more technique: "Dangle Swap" (cont'd)

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COACHING FOR FULL-STACK HUMANS

- I actually used this technique to create these last two pages. **I'd been productive earlier today, but I noticed my energy dissipating.** I went for a walk, which often recharges me, but this time it didn't.
- I still felt low-motivation when I got back, so **I told myself I'd try 15 minutes of a video game** (*Factorio*) to put my mind in a different mode for a little while.
- (By the way, **my policy is to literally set a 15 minute timer when I play**—*Factorio* is like sweet nectar for the ENTP mind, but it can be super addictive.)
- (Oh, and if you find yourself thinking there's no way you could have the self-control to stop after 15 minutes, it's not that I naturally have a crazy-high amount of self-control—I sure don't! It's that I've practiced this a lot and made progress bit by bit.)
- As I sat down and began to reach for my headphones to play, **I used this "Dangle Swap" technique to check if anything else felt doable.**
- One important thing here is that I was in a low-energy "meh" state. It wasn't like I was super excited to play the video game. It was more like *nothing* really sounded fun in that moment. **This technique works better in a state like that when it doesn't have to push against something that has high momentum already.**

- As I closed my eyes and checked in with myself, **I found a small-but-available willingness to do something else before getting to the game.** I was imagining writing a few more paragraphs of a blog post I've been working on, but then it hit me that the technique I had just used on myself would make a nice addition to this tiny-book.
- So, here I am finishing up these two pages. And after I've read them back over to correct any small mistakes, I'll treat myself to 15 minutes of *Factorio*.
- P.S. This is Michael from the future having just finished that second pass. An idea is striking me for yet another page to add to this tiny-book. Part of me wants to keep going to do that too, but I don't want to burn myself out.
- So, I'm going to compromise by **creating a new blank page with just the title in place to remind me to keep going when I finish the game.**
- Two benefits to that: (1) I won't forget the idea, and (2) It's easier to work from a starting point than a blank page.

Across all of this, managing your energy is key

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COACHING FOR FULL-STACK HUMANS

- Especially if you're an NP in the 16 personality types, **energy management is more important than time management.**
- When you're fully energized, so much seems possible. And when you're drained, even important things seem impossible. So, a critical trick is to **match the right action or activity to your current energy level.**
- **Step one is training yourself to determine where your energy level is in each moment.** This is harder than it sounds because our culture has trained us to routinely work past our capacity (i.e., toward burnout).
- So part of the work here is **finding your own indicators rather than relying on what you *think* you *should* be feeling** (e.g., "everyone else seems to have enough energy left after work to go out to happy hour, so I guess there's something wrong with me if I just want to go home").
- To begin your training here, **my best recommendation is to practice daily mindfulness and meditation.** Meditation is literally the practice of paying close attention to *exactly* what's happening for you *right now*. Here's my free series.

Where's your energy level right now?

When you're at ***full energy***, time is precious. Now is when it's most possible to **start something important.** At this level, try to take a step toward a huge, audacious goal. **Do something bold, creative, or innovative.**

When you're ***near-full***, aim to **make solid progress on a big goal you've already started**. Or, try to start work on goal that's important but not quite as big.

At ***half-full***, the teeter-totter could fall on either side. it might be possible to **boost your energy by getting moving** (e.g., doing some cardio, taking a dance break, going for a walk) or simply changing your environment. **Careful though**: If you push yourself to do a task that's too challenging, you might suddenly find yourself at the "near-empty" energy level.

At ***near-empty***, give yourself a break and **celebrate even small wins**. You might try out the **Grumpy Productivity technique**. Work on something you've been putting off because it's not fun—**busy work, or menial tasks** that don't require a lot of creativity or big-picture thinking.

When you're ***empty***, it's easy to either make big mistakes or **burn yourself out** (which means an even *longer* recovery time). Be mature enough to **completely forget about being productive**, and practice self-care instead. Take a bath. Go to bed early. **Whatever recharges you.**

Across all of this, managing your energy is key (cont'd)

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- **Remember: Energy is a function of many variables. Sleep is often one of the biggest ones, but it's not the *only* one.** It's possible to have super high-energy mornings even after a night of low sleep, just like it's possible to still feel drained after a full night's rest.
- **What's important here is not just *physical* energy, but mental and emotional energy too.** That makes the experience of being energized or drained quite subjective. It's not just a measure of how much energy you "should" have but how you actually *feel*.
- For example, here are three other factors (among many) that likely affect your emotional/mental energy level:
  1. **How inspired you feel**—whether it feels like you're doing something that's aligned with your life purpose, spiritual belief system, core values, or personal mission.
  2. **How well you're being emotionally nourished**. For extroverts, that might mean feeling connected to other people, and for introverts that might mean feeling connected to self and having quality alone time.
  3. **How supportive your current environment feels.** If you're feeling low energy, change something. If you're sitting, stand up. If you're inside, go for a walk outside. If you're alone, go be around people. If there's too much stimulation around you, seek quiet. If your decor isn't inspiring, repaint your walls, get plants, put up art, etc.

- **It's easy to think that motivation is a magical thing that just spontaneously strikes sometimes. But it's more like a plant sprouting in your garden of life, and that garden needs to be carefully tended to be fertile.**
- Motivation bubbles up when you have things like solid sleep, nutrition, exercise, relationships, hobbies, community, mindfulness, etc. **This piece ("tending the entire garden of life") is so important (and complex) that I wrote a whole separate tiny-book about it. Email me and I'll send it to you.**
- In general though, one of the best sources of motivation tends to be helping others. **Find ways to make a difference in someone else's life, however small.** If you're working on a project, try to get early and consistent feedback from others. Try to find opportunities to watch someone using a thing you made. Make sure you have reminders of the real impact you're making on the world.
- For example, when I hear a friend or client describe their challenges with getting things done, it'll often spark a new idea or remind me of a new section I'd been meaning to add to this tiny-book. Then, when I promise to send them something that might help with their issue (i.e., this tiny-book), that'll be the push I needed to finish the newest revision before sending it over.

Summary of the advanced techniques (print this out!)

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How to pick your "most important thing": What's truly the most important thing you'd love to get done tomorrow? What would take the biggest load off your shoulders or give you the most satisfaction, pride, or inspiration?

If you still can't choose:

1. Do you feel inspired to do something or like you'll lose something if you don't act on it quickly? Do that. If not:
2. Is there something that feels just barely doable right now, but if you put it off you know you won't feel able to do it anymore later? Do that. If not:
3. Is there something that will shift your state and give you energy to do even more afterward? Or, something that will drain your energy if you don't do it now? Do that.

Batching the Bad

When you're going to try to do one thing that feels unpleasant, see if you can do several at once (that are all part of the same category). But, be careful not to use this as an excuse to push yourself to do everything at once.

Grumpy Productivity

Already feeling grumpy? Slow down, focus on your body, breathe deeply. Give yourself empathy.

Carefully examine your energy (remember the five "battery levels"). Are you completely exhausted? If so, take a nap, go for a walk, etc. If not, check if there's a "flickering flame"—a sliver of motivation available to do a small-but-annoying thing you've been putting off.

You're already grumpy, so you might as well find something else to do that would put you in a bad mood anyway.

Dangle Swap

Does something not feel doable?

Dangle: Allow yourself to do a break activity (e.g., watch YouTube) but pause right before starting.

Swap: Check if something else productive feels just *barely* doable. If so, do it instead, but allow yourself to do the break activity afterward. Or, if it doesn't feel doable, take the break anyway.

Relative Sizing

Pick a representative S (small), M (medium), and L (large) task that you've completed in the past, and remind yourself how long each one took.

Then, instead of asking yourself how long a new task is likely to take you, ask yourself if it's most similar to your representative S task, your M one, or your L one.

Use that information to predict how long it'll take you to reach any given item on your prioritized todo list.

Strategic Stacking

Looking at your todo list, identify the top contenders to focus on.

Rate each according to *(1)* energy required, which tends to be higher if it's either ambitious or annoying, *(2)* subjective importance, which is how well it aligns with your life purpose, goals, and values, and *(3)* orbit, which is how pulled you are toward it or how close it feels (use your intuition to check).

Start with the item in closest orbit that's most important or requires the most energy.

This is so much bigger than just “productivity”

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What if you just decide to not have to be active all the time?

- Our society teaches us that it’s critical to be “productive”—that it’s a badge of honor to have a super busy life.
- **But, that doesn’t have to be true for you. Slow down. Decide that you’re *never* actually going to do one of the things on your list and that that’s ok.** Remember: It’s because you think you can do everything that you can’t actually finish anything.
- **Most deadlines aren’t real. Most todos aren’t critical.** People will tell you the opposite, but this is *your* life to design.
- You’re not as important as you think, and that’s a good thing. If you take a vacation from work, everything won’t go to hell. If it does, there’s something wrong with your organization, and I encourage you to prioritize training others to be able to take on the duties of someone who is out sick or on vacation.
- It wasn’t easy; but, **I’ve intentionally developed the habit of largely ignoring most of my (huge) todo lists, and nothing terrible has happened.** Seriously. In fact, I’ve felt more fulfilled than ever, and my business has taken off.
- **The secret is not to speed up to try to do more, but to slow down to actively try to do less.** Make sure that what you *do* do is important. Not important to society, to your parents, to your boss, or to your shareholders. **Important to *you*. You’re going to die someday (maybe tomorrow, though I hope not!). What actually matters?**
- So yes, what’s most important is your moment-to-moment experience of life. And, it’s also true that neglecting the annoying-but-important things (like filing your taxes) will create anxiety. **So, “what actually matters” is a combination of prioritizing the big fun things while also getting the bureaucratic things done too** (in as easeful and gentle a way as possible).

How many of the todos on your list are things you “*have*” to do, versus *want* to do, versus *other people want* you to do?

If your “most important thing” every day is either (a) something bureaucratic, (b) something for someone else, or (c), something for a business you don’t own, you’re doing it wrong.

Yes, sometimes your most important thing might be “pay bills” or “make dentist appointment”—especially if you’ve been putting it off for a while.

But aim to reach the point where your top thing is more like “write a chapter of my novel,” or “go for a long walk in silence,” or “write a message to reconnect with an old friend.”

How do you really want to be spending your time during your one precious life?

For more tips, I invite you to check out my YouTube channel.

Here are two videos to start with, and if they resonate, I invite you to please subscribe.

Thanks so much for reading.

One last thing: Could I ask you a favor? Each of my tiny-books involves hundreds of hours of work, and I release them for free to try to help other people and make the world a better place.

It means a lot to me to receive feedback on how well I'm doing that—whether it's kind-but-constructive criticism, specific praise about parts you appreciated, or letting me know how it impacted your life.

If you're open to it, I'd love to hear from you: michael@michaelcaloz.com.

And, if you'd like some one-on-one support, I invite you to try out coaching totally risk-free and no-commitment:

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Thank you, and I hope you have a nourishing day.
—Michael