



---

## The Busy Trap

---



David Allen

### PRODUCTIVITY PRINCIPLE #59

*You are not your work.*

(COMMENTARY)

Uncaptured, unclarified, and therefore unmanaged things you implicitly have agreed to do something about own a piece of you, and give you no rest. Naming your stuff gives you power over it. The best and most productive way to do your work is to be its master, not its slave.

---

### QUOTES

---

*"To control attention means to control experience, and therefore the quality of life." — Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi*

*"When hungry, eat your rice; when tired, close your eyes. Fools may laugh at me, but wise men will know what I mean." — Lin-Chi*

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

#### "THE BIG SECRET ABOUT MY LISTS"

As many of you know by now, I have quite a few lists, and quite a few things on them. But I think it's time to share with you a seriously big secret about my lists: some of the best projects I've done were never on them!

What???! Aren't lists supposed to be the way you Get Things Done? Have I been fooling you all along? Have I just duped you into believing that getting things out of your head, processing them into outcomes and actions, and writing the results into objective categories for consistent review is the way to get all your stuff accomplished?

It may seem that's what I've been preaching. Indeed, those behaviors get a LOT of things done, because it gets them unstuck by defining the "done" and the "doing". But many people miss the real reason for doing this. You don't make the lists of actions and projects just to get them all done, and do nothing else in your life. You process the things you have attention on so you can really do what you feel like doing. And really do it, with 100 percent of your focus and creative energy, with abandon.

I just spent all morning pruning my large pine tree. It felt great, my creative juices were flowing, my aesthetics were sparking for just the right shapes and spatial relationships in that part of our yard.

(Continued Pg.2)

## TIP

Keep a “Next time in...” set of lists. For years I wondered what to do with all those things that showed up when someone said, “Hey, the next time you’re in...(Dallas, Switzerland, or the Gobi Desert)...you ought to...(look me up, eat at Joe’s, shop for nose rings)”. Now I have “Next time in...” as a Category in my Palm Memos, with each location as a separate memo in that section. It’s a discrete version of Someday/Maybe for that context. You could also keep a file folder or just a paper-based list for the city or country.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT (Continued from Pg.1)

But it wasn’t on a list. This morning it just seemed like the thing to do.

If I didn’t have the lists I have, and if I hadn’t done a thorough review of them within the last few days, I wouldn’t have been able to trust that my inventory of “defined work” was complete and current this morning. And that it could wait. Without that conscious self-renegotiation process, there would be at least a slight gnawing sense of anxiety that there were “should’s” lurking in the shadows that could attack me at any moment! And what’s the best (temporary) relief and (false) protection from the unseen and ugly “should’s”? Be BUSY.

Without my lists, I would probably still have pruned my pine tree this morning. But for all the wrong reasons.

*“Be steady and well-ordered in your life so that you can be fierce and original in your work.”*

— *Gustave Flaubert*