



# FINANCIAL PREPAREDNESS

*"One of life's most painful moments comes when we must admit that we didn't do our homework, that we are not prepared." ~ Merlin Olsen*

Issue #262  
February 20, 2026

## Getting Things Done

*Anxiety is caused by a lack of control, organization, preparation and action. ~ David Kekich*

Every bibliophile is aware of a number of books in their areas of interest that are considered classics but that they've never gotten around to reading. For me, [Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity](#) (4.5 stars, Should Read) by David Allen is one of those books. Embarrassingly for this personal productivity aficionado, I started reading it within years of its publication in 2001 but never got around to finishing it.

Allen argues that "The purpose of...workflow management is...to enable [your brain] to move toward more elegant and productive activity. In order to earn that freedom, however, your brain must engage on some consistent basis with all your commitments and activities. You must be assured that you're doing what you need to be doing, and that it's OK to be *not* doing what you're not doing."

Allen writes that "most of the stress people experience comes from inappropriately managed commitments they make or accept." He defines these "incompletes" or "open loops" as "anything pulling at your attention that doesn't belong where it is, the way it is....Consider how many things you feel even the smallest amount of responsibility to change, finish, handle or do something about."

Allen notes that the part of your psyche that stores your mental list of open loops (the ones you haven't yet recorded in a trusted system) has no sense of past and future: "It's all present tense in there....as soon as you tell yourself that you should do something, if you file it only in your short-term memory, there's a part of you that thinks you should be doing it *all the time*." So you see how this could create anxiety.

Allen says that "...you must first identify and collect all those things that are 'ringing your bell' in some way, and then plan how to handle them....Anything you consider unfinished in any way must be captured in a trusted system outside your mind...[in] a collection bucket that you know you'll come back to regularly and sort through." Allen defines this "stuff" as "anything you have allowed into your psychological or physical world that doesn't belong where it is, but for which you haven't yet determined the desired outcome and the next action step."

Allen continues, "[1] Every open loop must be in your collection system and out of your head [so it can be used for higher level thinking instead of merely trying to remember things], [2] You must have as few collection buckets as you can get by with, and [3] You must empty them regularly....'stuff' is controlling *you* and taking up more psychic energy than it deserves....you can feel good about what you're not doing only when you *know* what you're not doing."

You should collect all of the open loops in your life in a comprehensive way, a process that could take many hours or even days. This includes the loops that are inside your mind, gathering anything "that may be residing in your psychic RAM...that has your attention."

One collection bucket that everyone should have is a calendar. Allen argues that "the calendar should be sacred territory. If you write something there, it must get done that day or not at all." I disagree. I insert a number tasks on my calendar because I *want* and *plan* to get them done that day, but every day the world comes at you with several unexpected fires (usually belonging to other people) that you must put out either immediately or ASAP. Allen writes that you should leave all of the tasks that are not on your calendar in the category of "as soon as possible, against all the other things I have to do."

One bucket Allen recommends that I've used before informally without realizing that it should be a formal collection bucket is a separate Agenda for each person that you discuss matters with. That way, when you see them again (which may be somewhat infrequently), you have an agenda of items to discuss with them that you don't have to remember until the next time you see them.

Once you've collected all of your open loops, the next step is to "get to the bottom of 'in', [which] doesn't mean actually *doing* all the actions and projects that you've collected. It just means identifying each item and deciding what it is, what it means, and what you're going to do with it....you must clarify exactly what your commitment is and decide what you have to do...to make progress toward fulfilling it."

Allen argues that if you have a task that you can get done in less than two minutes, you should go ahead and do it now even if it's not a high priority because “it starts taking longer to store and track an item than to deal with it the first time it's in your hands [i.e.,] it's the efficiency cutoff.”

Allen says that managing *action* is the prime challenge: “What you *do* with your time, what you *do* with information, and what you *do* with your body and your focus relative to your priorities—those are the real options to which you must allocate your limited resources. The real issue is how to make appropriate choices about what to *do* at any point in time.”

Once you've processed everything in your inbox, you'll have (1) discarded what you don't need, (2) completed any tasks that can be done in less than two minutes, (3) delegated any tasks that other people should do, (4) recorded reminders in your system of tasks that take longer than two minutes, and (5) identified any larger projects.

The book includes a fantastic flowchart of how each item of “stuff” should be processed. Once you have identified an item in your inbox, the next critical decision you must make is, “Is it actionable?” If the answer is No, then you should either discard it, incubate it for possible future action, or store it as a reference. If it's actionable, then the next critical question is “What's the next action?” This is the most important takeaway from the book.

As Allen explains, “Without a next action, there remains a potentially infinite gap between current reality and what you need to do....you're going to have to [eventually] figure out the next action at some point anyway. The problem is that most people wait to do it until the next action is 'Call the Auto Club for a tow truck!!'...when the in-basket and the action lists get ignored for too long, random things lying in them tend to surface as emergencies later on....” Indeed!

Allen writes that “there are seven primary types of things that you'll want to keep track of and manage,” including a Projects list, a calendar, a Next Actions list, a Waiting For list, Reference material, and a Someday/Maybe list.

Once you've completed all of the scheduled tasks on your calendar, you can then turn to your “Next Actions” lists, which “hold the inventory of predefined actions that you can take if you have any discretionary time during the day.” You could organize these by context (i.e., *where* you would need to be to do them).

Allen provides a Four-Criteria Model for choosing actions in the moment: First, context (your current location), then time available, followed by energy available and priority. Regarding a task's priority, Allen writes, “Given your context, time and energy available, what action will give you the highest payoff?”

After you reclaim your email inbox as “in,” Allen writes that “anything residing there will be like a message on your answering machine—a blinking light telling you you need to process something. Most people use their email 'in' for staging still-undecided actionable things and reference, a practice that rapidly numbs the mind: they know they've got to reassess everything *every time* they glance at the screen.”

Allen recommends reviewing your life and work at appropriate intervals and levels (see my issues about [daily](#), [weekly](#), [quarterly](#) and [annual](#) reviews). He writes, “the Weekly Review is whatever you need to do to get your head empty again. It's going through the five phases of workflow management—collecting, processing, organizing and reviewing all your outstanding” open loops. “It's your chance to scan all the defined actions and options before you, thus radically increasing the efficacy of the choices you make about what you're doing at any point in time.” Afterwards, you should be able to say, “I absolutely know right now everything I'm not doing but could be doing if I decided to.”

Allen recommends reviewing all of your open loops, Projects, Next Actions, Waiting For and Someday/Maybe lists every week. After years of doing weekly reviews, I recommend you review your Long Term Projects (multi-task projects you want to get done but haven't assigned them to a timeframe yet) monthly and your Someday/Maybe list quarterly. Otherwise, your weekly reviews will take too long. It's possible to spend too much time reviewing and not enough time *doing*.

Finally, Allen notes that one of the benefits of a well-managed workflow is that “When people with whom you interact notice that without fail you receive, process and organize in an airtight manner the exchanges and agreements they have with you, they begin to trust you in a unique way.” Conversely, “The price people pay when they break agreements...is the disintegration of trust in the relationship...”

[Follow Me on X](#)

[Newsletter Archive](#)

I would love to hear from you! If you have any comments, suggestions, insight/wisdom, or you'd like to share a great article, please leave a comment.

## Disclaimer

*The content of this newsletter is intended to be and should be used for informational/ educational purposes only. You should not assume that it is accurate or that following my recommendations will produce a positive result for you. You should either do your own research and analysis, or hire a qualified professional who is aware of the facts and circumstances of your individual situation.*

*Financial Preparedness LLC is not a registered investment advisor. I am not an attorney, accountant, doctor, nutritionist or psychologist. I am not YOUR financial planner or investment advisor, and you are not my client.*

*Investments carry risk, are not guaranteed, and do fluctuate in value, and you can lose your entire investment. Past performance is not indicative of future performance. You should not invest in something you don't understand, or put all of your eggs in one basket.*

*Before starting a new diet or exercise regimen, you should consult with a doctor, nutritionist, dietician, or personal trainer.*