

PART I

Thinking Smarter

**General ways to
make your brain
work better for you**

I Make a Done List

"What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals."

Zig Ziglar

Before you read this, I want you to leaf through your work diary.

Is there anything inspiring in there? Were you impressed by how much you've achieved?

I know when I look through old work diaries, all I find are lists of meetings and to-do lists.

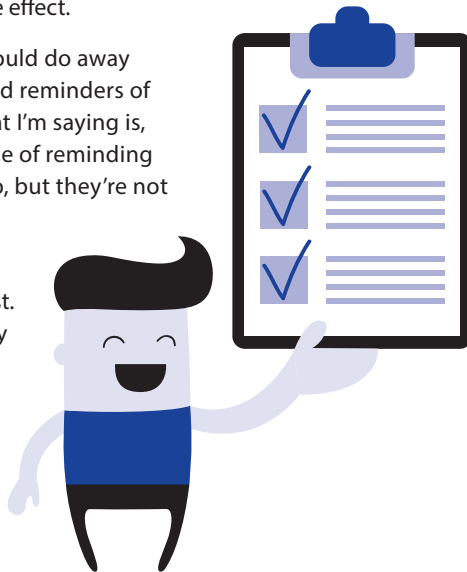
Even on your phone or laptop, there are endless productivity apps enticing you in to make to-do lists in new and different ways.

The trouble with to-do lists, is I don't think they make us any more productive. I don't think they excite and stimulate our minds to want to get things done.

Usually we don't finish them anyway, which immediately has a negative effect.

Now I'm not saying we should do away with to-do lists. We all need reminders of what we've got to do. What I'm saying is, they serve a useful purpose of reminding us of things we need to do, but they're not actually going to make us more productive.

What you need is a done list. Seeing what you've actually achieved will spur you on. Of course, you may look back and think how little you have achieved, but hopefully this will also spur you on even more.



One of the dangers of to-do lists is we think we're being productive because we're ticking things off a list. But how many of those things you're ticking off are things you truly value? The benefit of a done list, is you only put things on it that are of value to you.

So how do you decide what is of value and is worthy of putting on your list? Well, for starters you don't want to put everything on it, for example, "Called Debra in accounts" or "Had meeting with marketing", otherwise it just becomes a completed to-do list.

A good rule of thumb, is only put things on it that at the end of the year you'd look back at and be proud of.

To-do lists are about goals, a done list is about achievements.

One of the big differences of a done list, as opposed to a to-do list, is the positive effect it has on your brain.

A to-do list gets the things you have to do out of your head and onto paper. It unclutters your brain. The trouble is, how often do you complete the list? I find I do half of it and then the rest gets transferred to the next day's list.

A long to-do list means: "we've got a lot to do" – it doesn't mean we do a lot.

“To-do lists are about goals, a done list is about achievements.”

Unconsciously it changes from a to-do list into a "what you haven't done list" and creates more stress and anxiety.

A done list of things you have achieved creates positive associations and creates new connections in your brain making you feel more positive about yourself.

Of course the danger is to think that you feel you can only put big achievements on there, but this couldn't be further from the truth. If this is the year that you decide to run a marathon, don't just make an entry on the actual day you ran a marathon, put in an entry for how long you ran on each day you trained leading up to it.

Don't Break the Chain

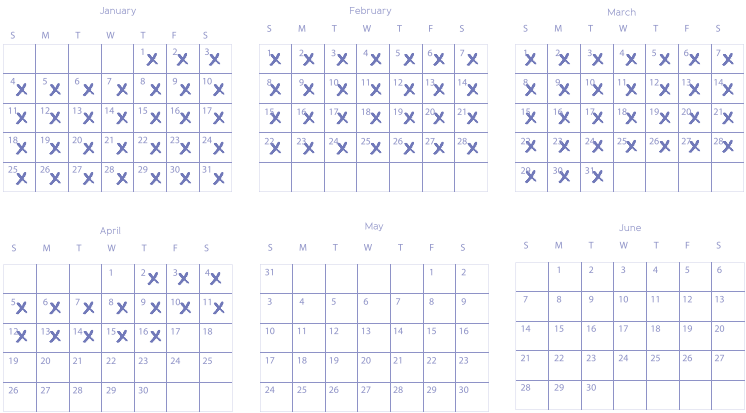
What's important is that you have achievable goals that you stick to. If you make your targets too hard, you either won't achieve them and feel you've failed, or you'll put them off for a day and then another day and before you know it, you've given up on the task completely.

Just try to do a little bit every day

When comic hopeful Brad Isaac asked Jerry Seinfeld¹ if he had any advice he replied that the way to be a better comic was to create better jokes and the way to create better jokes was to write every day. How he made sure he kept to this was a done list in the form of a wall calendar.

He got a big calendar that had a whole year on it, and hung it on the wall next to his desk. Every day he completed his task of writing he'd put a big red X over that day.

"After a few days you'll have a chain. Just keep at it and the chain will grow longer every day. You'll like seeing that chain, especially when you get a few weeks under your belt. Your only job next is to not break the chain," said Seinfeld, emphasizing "Don't break the chain."



If you're building a house, you can stand back at the end of each day and admire how much you've built that day. But the trouble with a lot of our tasks on a day-to-day basis is that there's no physical proof of what we've done. That's the great thing with a done list, as in the example of Seinfeld's calendar, you can stand back and be proud of what you've achieved.

The thing with a done list is it can be about anything. What's important is that it's something of value to you. It could be steps towards starting your own business, it could be about how much weight you've lost, how much time you've spent reading a book; if you're some high flying businessman or woman it could be about how much quality time you managed to spend with your family. Like I say, it can be about anything, but it has to be something that you value.

What I'd recommend is having a done list calendar like Jerry Seinfeld for the one task you want to push yourself to work on everyday. But as well as this I'd recommend you start a done list diary.

Don't just get some cheap office diary, get a nice diary like a Moleskine; something you'll treasure. After all, it holds your achievements for the year, so it should be something a little bit special. Try to review your day's achievements and make your entry in your done list diary at the same time every day.

The more you can make a habit of it, the more likely you are to keep to it. The more of a habit you make of it, the more you start to create more engrained pathways in the brain to make it harder to stop. Seinfeld's motto "Don't break the chain" has the obvious visual reminder of a calendar on the wall, but at the same time it is creating an unconscious habit.

They say "history will be the judge". Now your history will be there for you to judge.

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