

**TAME THE DIGITAL CHAOS**

**TIME MANAGEMENT & DIGITAL  
DETOX FOR LGBTQ+ LAWYERS &  
LAW STUDENTS -  
YOUR 26 WEEK ACTION PLAN**

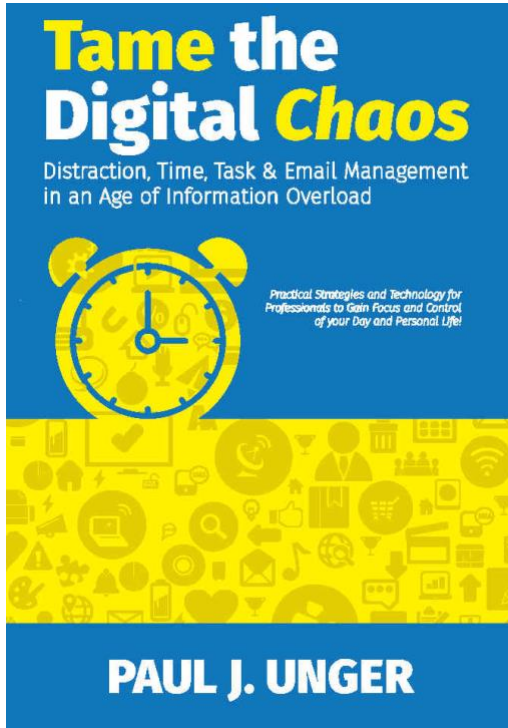
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**PAUL J. UNGER**

**[PUNGER@AFFINITYCONSULTING.COM](mailto:PUNGER@AFFINITYCONSULTING.COM)**

## EXCERPTS FROM TAME THE DIGITAL CHAOS ®



Materials contained below are excerpts from the full book, *Tame the Digital Chaos – Distraction, Time, Task & Email Management in an Age of Information Overload*.

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## MEET THE AUTHOR

*PAUL J. UNGER, ESQ.*



Paul J. Unger is a nationally-recognized speaker, author, and thought-leader in the legal technology industry. He is an attorney and founding principal of Affinity Consulting Group, a nationwide consulting company providing legal technology consulting, continuing legal education, and training. He is the author of dozens legal technology manuals and publications, including recently published books *Fight the Paper* (2019) and *PowerPoint in an Hour for Lawyers* (2014). He served as Chair of the ABA Legal Technology Resource Center (2012-13, 2013-14) ([www.lawtechnology.org](http://www.lawtechnology.org)) and Chair of ABA TECHSHOW (2011) ([www.techshow.com](http://www.techshow.com)). Mr. Unger now spends most of his time speaking, coaching, leading professional development programs for lawyers, and conducting technology and practice management assessments.

I can't remember exactly where I was when I heard that China reported the first coronavirus death, but I was in an airport somewhere in North America. I believe it may have been Newfoundland, but who knows. I was on another marathon tour of travel for work. I remember thinking that this sounds like another outbreak of SARS. Admittedly, I wasn't terribly concerned, but I recall washing my hands extra-long throughout the day, and paid special attention to not touching my eyes, nose or mouth, a practice that I have grown accustomed to over the decades of travel in airports.

A few weeks later, I woke up in New Orleans with the worst sore throat that I could remember in decades. I muddled through speaking 6-hours a day throughout that week, elbow bumping people instead of shaking hands. People were not concerned, as they continued to walk into my personal space to ask questions and share stories even though my nose was red and I was clearly congested. I must have gone through 4 boxes of Kleenex in 2 days. I was a mess, but I made it through. I woke up in Columbus on March 6th and fell right back asleep and did not get out of bed for 3 days. I started a self-quarantine March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020 and have been home ever since. I remained sick for the next 4+ weeks.

I never thought that a year later I would still be working from home. As of the date of writing this paper, more Americans are dying of Covid-19 than U.S. soldiers died each day in World War II. Other than trips to the grocery store and to visit my mother, I am restricted to home. While I feel that I am tolerating this situation fairly well today, there are days that I do not.

On bad days, and sometimes bad weeks, I am experiencing many of the same problems as so many others similarly situated. Problems:

- Sleeping
- Focusing
- Doom-scrolling/surfing
- Monkey Mind
- Mild depression
- “Cabin Fever”

Sadly, many people are having even more severe problems. Substance abuse is up ... way up! Non-prescribed Fentanyl use is up 32%. Drug-related overdoses are up 18%. Unemployment ... suicide ... death of friends and family.

In researching ways to improve focus and sleep during the pandemic, I ran across some interesting research. Many of the distraction and time management techniques that I have been teaching for years are heavily used. I also picked up some new tools and knowledge. In this paper/plan, I thought it might be helpful to share those and help you assemble an Action Plan. However, I present these techniques in a slightly different way ... as a “NOT to do list.” Here are 26 “Nots” over 26 weeks to detox yourself from information overload and improve your focus.

## **DON'T TRY TO BOIL THE OCEAN!**

First and foremost, focus on each item one week at a time. Go out of order if you want. You make the rules and can tweak the processes as needed. While one item per week may not seem fast enough for you, let me assure you, if you are following 80% of these rules 6 months from now, you will be in great shape. Have a little patience and execute each item consistently. Think of the long game. When you feel ready, move on to another item. If you want to go *a little* faster, go ahead. Be an overachiever. If you stumble, just stop and regroup. Take a week or two and focus on the items that you have already executed. Don't take on a new item until you are comfortably back on the wagon.

## PREPARE & CARE FOR YOUR BRAIN



### Week 1 - Do NOT Neglect Sleep!

#### Defeating “Coronasomnia”

Insomnia was a problem before Covid-19. It is no surprise that Covid-19 has piled on even more reasons to lose sleep: stress, “cabin fever,” anxiety, depression, unemployment, death of loved ones. The list is endless. “It’s a problem everywhere, across all age groups,” ... “the increase [of insomnia] is enormous,” said Angela Drake, a UC Davis Health clinical professor in the Department of Psychiatry.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Sleep Foundation ([www.cdc.gov/sleep](http://www.cdc.gov/sleep)), most healthy adults need 7–9 hours of sleep per night. Good sleep quality is very important. Getting up several times a night or waking up multiple times per night with breathing problems can adversely affect the quality of your sleep.

According to research at the University of Toronto, even just one night of sleep deprivation showed significant decline in cognitive performance. fMRI studies showed declined activity in certain regions of the prefrontal cortex, the same area of the brain that allow for decision-making, problem-solving and planning (Front. Hum. Neurosci., 22 April 2014).

WebMD states that poor sleep leads to significant problems, some of which are very serious:

- Moodiness
- Anxiousness
- Paranoia
- Depressed mood
- Difficulty understanding new concepts
- Forgetfulness
- Lack of focus
- High blood pressure
- Severe headaches

- Diabetes

Dr. Drake from UC Davis provides these tips for better sleep:

- **Keep a normal daily routine:** “If you’re working from home, keep the same schedule as if you were going to work,” Hardin said. “Don’t sleep in or stay up late. When that alarm rings, as painful as is, get up.” And give yourself a break during the day, just as you would in the office. Take a lunch break or go for a walk or just get outside.
- **Create and keep a going-to-bed routine:** “Slow down at the end of your day,” Drake said. “Begin turning down the lights about a half hour before bed. Bright lights will keep your brain from producing natural melatonin (a hormone that is part of our natural sleep cycle and helps us sleep).
- **Avoid screens in the bedroom:** The blue light from cellphones, tablets and computers signals our bodies to stay awake and not release melatonin. “I know this is hard for people, but please put down the electronics. TV is OK but it’s even better to read a book.” Hardin said. “You don’t want that light from a screen right in your face.”
- **Don’t use your bedroom, and especially your bed, as your office:** “You want to train your brain that this is the place where you rest,” Drake said. “You don’t want it saying, ‘This is where you work.’ If you have nowhere else to work, at least don’t work on the bed.”
- **Get some exercise during the day:** It reduces stress and keeps our bodies in their normal rhythms. It’s best, however, to finish the exercise a few hours before bedtime to give your body time to cool down and slow down.
- **Don’t take naps:** A short power nap won’t hurt, if it’s not too late in the day, but sleeping longer will throw off your sleep cycle. “That’s another reason not to worry about one bad night,” Drake said. “It’s better to be tired for a day and then get a good night’s sleep.”
- **Get some sunlight:** It helps keep our circadian rhythms in pattern so we produce melatonin at night, not during the day.
- **Don’t eat dinner late:** “If you’re going to bed at 11 p.m., try not to eat after 7 pm or so,” Hardin said. “You have to

give your body time to digest it. When you go to sleep, your body wants to shut down all the metabolic work, including digestion.”

- **If you wake up in the middle of the night and can't sleep, get out of bed:** A change of scenery helps you reset, but keep lights low and don't do anything that gets you energized. “If you can't sleep for more than a half hour, get up and leave the bedroom,” Hardin said. “Do something simple and monotonous in dim light.”
- **Cut back on news and social media, especially in the evening:** “I've had to limit the news consumption for some patients,” Drake said. “Our brains are not really wired to handle all the constant news alerts and headlines. They're constantly ringing our alarm bells. It's like the car alarm in our brain is constantly going off.”
- **Go easy on the alcohol and caffeine:** They both throw off your sleep patterns. Alcohol can help you fall asleep, but not necessarily stay asleep or sleep well. “Not all sleep is equal,” Hardin said. “We want the right sleep.”
- **Be careful with sleep medication:** Over-the-counter medication can give you fitful sleep or leave you drowsy in the morning, and prescription drugs can create an emotional dependence.
- **Try learning to meditate with one of the many apps available:** “I'm a big believer in meditation,” Drake said. “It can improve sleep and it emphasizes the importance of our mind-body connection. It does take a little practice, but it lowers our stress hormones. We have some new neuroimaging research that has demonstrated the positive changes in the brain.”

(*UC Davis Health*, Newsroom, September 23, 2020)





## Week 2 - Do NOT Worry So Much!

*“Worrying doesn’t take away tomorrow’s troubles. It takes away today’s peace.”*

- Unknown

Worrying can be good, but not when it is excessive. For instance, if you have a presentation tomorrow in front of your peers, or a hearing before a new judge, a little bit of “healthy” worrying can be extremely helpful so you can prepare. On one hand, your worries can make you and your organization more prepared for situations. On the other hand, when your worrying is excessive, it can be annoying and even outright paralyzing. It can bring projects to a complete halt.

The science behind worrying is fascinating. The same circuits in the frontal lobes of your brain that allow for superior human intelligence: decision-making, problem-solving, and planning, are also responsible for worry & anxiety. When higher-functioning brain regions are preoccupied with worry, you can’t access them for the other things like decision-making, etc. Worrying takes precedent. When this happens, your amygdala hijacks your brain and puts the brakes on higher-level thinking.

Further, according to the Chopra Center ([www.chopra.com](http://www.chopra.com)), worrying too much can affect both mind and body:

- Disrupted sleep
- Headaches
- Concentration difficulties
- Nausea
- Muscle tension
- Exhaustion
- Irritability
- Elevated cortisol (stress hormone)
- Difficulty making decisions

Breaking the cycle of worry can be difficult but let me share with you two practical strategies that help me.

First, practice mindfulness or another form of meditation. If you are unfamiliar, I strongly recommend a few apps to try on your smartphone that will lead you through short, but very helpful sessions:

- Headspace
- Breathe
- Calm

Second, start a journal to write down those things that are worrying you, and then get back to the work at hand. Also use the journal before you go to bed to write down how you feel. Many times, putting it down on paper can bring clarity. At a minimum, it will reduce anxiety. I write down micro-entries (very short bullet points) in my daily planning journal. It requires 1-2 minutes of my time.



### **Week 3 – Do NOT Doomscroll or Doomsurf**

Ever find yourself unable to put your device down, as you scroll through the infinite number of social media posts on Facebook and the like? Most of it is either bad news or someone painting their lives as perfect with their perfect white picket fence, perfect new job promotion, and perfect 6-pack abs after “working out 365 perfect straight days!” Right? It’s downright defeating. What are we looking for anyway? Some ray of hope? The reality is that it is not only a huge time-suck, but it is harmful to our mental health. What can you do?

- **Set Boundaries:** I found during the presidential campaign season that I had to put limits on my exposure to certain politicians and my use of Facebook. For me, it wasn’t enough to set aspirational boundaries, I had to utilize the iOS Screen Time function to block myself from trying to knock some cyber sense into some of my family and friends because they did not share the same political and moral beliefs. With Screen Time (and similar functions on an Android device), you can completely block yourself from apps during desired hours, and you can limit your total time

to however much time you designate. For instance, no more than 30 minutes a day on Facebook.

- **Replace Doomscrolling with Something Healthy:** If during business hours, anytime you feel the urge to jump on Facebook, instead dedicate that time to reaching out to a colleague or client to check in on them. If during non-business hours, write a letter, card or text message to a family member, or jump on a video call with them. Read a book, go for a walk or run, do pushups, stretch, journal, or clean out a closet.



## **Week 4 - Do NOT Ruminare – Learn to Tame “Monkey Mind”**

Rumination is the process of continuously thinking the same negative or sad thoughts. It occurs during the day, as well as during bouts of insomnia. When some ruminate, they also self-reflect and problem-solve. That sometimes lures people into believing they are doing something healthy or productive.

Related to rumination, but a bit different is “Monkey Mind,” or racing thoughts. Where rumination is someone thinking about the same negative thought, Monkey Mind is someone thinking about many different thoughts. For example, you are working late, and you wish you took that job in Canada, which reminds you that you may want to buy a Thermador, but which one and you don’t have the money. You next start thinking about cooking classes instead, which reminds you of your ex’s terrible cooking, and how you have to fix that nagging roof leak. These thoughts are typically negative as well, and they are all over the place – like a monkey swinging from limb to limb. It is worried, unsettled mental chatter. We sometimes call it catastrophic thinking because nothing goes well, and it usually results in stress over unresolved problems.

Like worrying, fear and jealousy, rumination and monkey mind activates, ... you guessed it ... the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that is also associated with logical thinking.

**Mindfulness.** Practicing mindfulness quiets the amygdala, which reduces the release of cortisol. Mindfulness is a form of meditation that often involves deep breathing. It is an incredibly

important tool because once the emotions are triggered, we need a practical strategy to stop the racing. To learn about these techniques, I recommend either a therapist, life coach, group meditation, or if none of those appeal to you, there are numerous apps that will privately lead you through these exercises like Headspace, Calm, or Breathe (discussed above).

**Rumination Diary.** Equally important is learning the environmental triggers and figuring out how to manage them. Many experts recommend keeping a journal to record when it happened, what happened right before the ruminations started, how did it make you feel, what were your thoughts, what stopped it?

**If Causing Insomnia, Get out of Bed.** If rumination is preventing you from falling asleep, it is important to get out of bed slowly and go do something calm like light reading or even meditation. Journaling your thoughts is often recommended, even at night. Stay away from bright light or activity that will keep you falling back asleep. Once calm and the rumination stops, try to return to bed.

**Positive Talk + Time Limit.** You can also combat the negative thoughts with mind racing positive thoughts. This lessens the likelihood that we begin to obsess over the negative in the first place. Whatever the case, set a time limit of 10 minutes – not a minute longer. After the 10 minutes is up, say to yourself “no thank you, ... I have already thought about this enough. It is time for peace.”



## **Week 5 - Do NOT Go Without Deep Breathing**

One part of mindfulness that I find incredibly helpful is deep breathing (typically 6 breaths per minute). Many promote a 3 count while inhaling, and a 3 count while exhaling, but I have seen small variations of this work just as well. While I talk about this topic in multiple places within this paper, it is so important, inexpensive, and easy that I wanted to dedicate a full week for you to explore and perfect the practice. Perhaps start with deep breathing, and if you like the results, think about mindfulness or another form of meditation.

A 2017 study published in *Frontiers in Psychology* showed that deep breathing resulted in significant improvement on attention, stress and cortisol levels. Deep breathing calms the Amygdala, which reduces the secretion of cortisol (see <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5455070/>).



## **Week 6 - Do NOT Neglect Your Brain by Feeding it Poor Nutrition**

We too often fill our bodies with unhealthy food that can impair our ability to focus. In the short term, we can experience a food coma after eating too heavily at lunch or consuming too much sugar when snacking. It leaves our brains foggy. In the long term, we may develop chronic diseases that limit our activities and enjoyment of life.

An easy way to achieve better nutrition is by implementing a handful of healthy boundaries. Here are some examples of healthy food boundaries that will lead to weight loss and healthier lifestyle, without having to commit to a formal diet. Adjust these examples to help you control some of your own vices.

- I will not consume more than one 3 oz bag of potato chips per day.
- I will not consume more than 250 calories of sugary snacks.
- I will not eat after 7:00 pm.
- I will always eat a single serving of plain oatmeal for breakfast Monday through Friday.
- I will not consume more than 2000 calories in a single day.
- I will eat no more than 1 small bowl of ice cream per week.
- My dietary intake will be 90% plant-based and 10% animal protein.
- I will replace 90% of my current unhealthy snacks with fruits and nuts.
- I will drink no less than 12 glasses of water per day.

## GIVE YOUR BRAIN A SENSE OF CONTROL

When you feel in control, it calms the amygdala and stress response. This is why we always feel more focused and less stressed when we have a plan.



### Week 7 - Do NOT Begin Your Day Without a Plan

Instead of jumping into email, begin your day by operating from your daily roadmap. Commit to a 5-minute planning session with yourself at the end of the today for tomorrow or start your day with a 5-minute planning session. If you don't have a plan, you will become part of someone else's plan!

Use the Tame the Digital Chaos daily planning sheet, or another commercial planner like Best Self Journal or Covey, for this and time block your day on paper, remembering to state some 30,000-foot goals for the day. Blank planning sheets are included at the end of this handout. Recite 3 things that you are thankful for. Put a plan together for your day *before* diving into email. You can always adjust as the day unfolds but start with a plan! Consider doing your plan at the end of the previous day and spend a couple minutes in the morning reviewing it instead of jumping into email. Also be sure to cross things off from your list as you complete them to give your brain a shot of feel-good dopamine.

Date: 2/18/2021	
<b>PRIORITIES</b> 🏠	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Review Medical Record Requests</li> <li>2 Washington Settlement</li> <li>3 Smith Depo</li> <li>4 Prep for Retreat</li> <li>5</li> </ol>	<p>Jones Smith Doe Davis Settlement K Agreed Order</p>
<b>GRATEFUL THOUGHTS</b> 😊	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mom</li> <li>2. My Health - lab results</li> <li>3. Jane - send a card today 🙏</li> </ol>	
<b>TODAY'S TIME BLOCKING</b>	
<p>7:00 Walk dog - Short run</p> <p>8:00 Business Development</p> <p>9:00 Medical Records Review</p> <p>10:00 Email</p> <p>11:00 Smith Depo Prep</p> <p>12:00</p> <p>1:00 Smith Depo</p> <p>2:00</p> <p>3:00 Email - Admin - Butter - Lunch</p> <p>4:00 Washington Settlement</p> <p>5:00</p> <p>6:00 Retreat Prep</p> <p>7:00</p> <p>8:00 Date Night + Netflix</p> <p>9:00</p>	
<b>NOTES</b>	<p>Appliance Repair 867-5399</p> <p>New iPhone?</p>



## **Week 8 - Do NOT Start Your Day Without a Team Huddle**

Instead of diving right into your email or your first appointment or project, after your 5-minute daily planning session (above), have a quick huddle with your immediate team. We call this the “lightning round.” Each person has 60 seconds to recite what they have going on that day in detail, and broadly for the rest of the week. This encourages communication and awareness of projects, and almost always results in shifting some tasks and schedules around to better distribute work and help each other. It also reduced interruptions during the day because everyone is more aware of deadlines around the team.

If your team works from home or multiple locations, use tools like Zoom, Teams, or GoToMeeting. Be disciplined about time. Beware of “meeting creep.” If the meetings constantly go over, it is no longer a huddle, and people will quickly grow annoyed. Larger teams should think about breaking into smaller huddles, so this doesn’t turn into a 30 minute meeting.

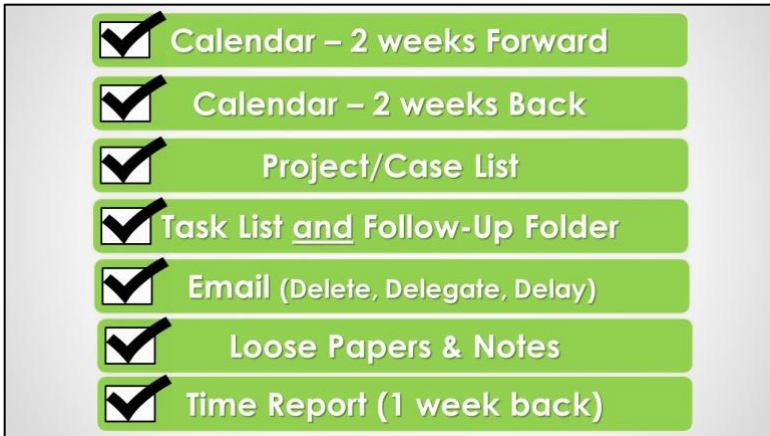


## **Week 9 - Do NOT Begin Your Week Without Weekly Planning**

A once-a-week “get organized” deep dive is absolutely essential to successful time and distraction management. This is a 60-minute commitment once a week. It will help you frame realistic daily planning, clean your workspace, eliminate piles, review all tasks and deadlines on your plate, catch up on tasks that slip between the cracks, and keep focused on the big picture goals that you want to achieve. It will help you stay driven. Failing to plan is planning to fail.

It is extremely helpful do your weekly deep dive planning session on the same day and time each week. Performing this one-hour ritual on the same day and time each week will make it infinitely easier to develop a habit of engaging in this important planning.

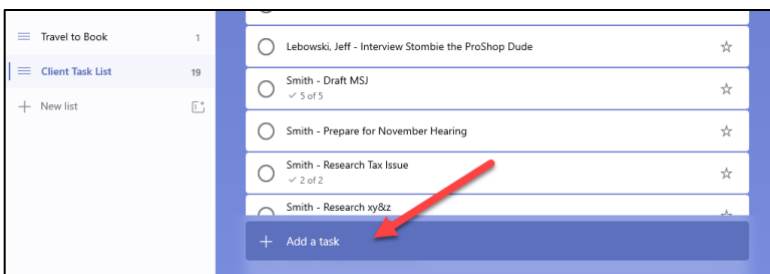
Try to do your deep-dive 2 to 3 days before starting the next week.



## **Week 10 - Do NOT Fail to Write Down Tasks and Random Neural Firings**

The main reason tasks and deadlines slip between the cracks is because people fail to immediately write them down in an organized system. The reason they don't enter them into an organized system is because they are too cumbersome to record, especially when they are not at their computer.

The answer to this problem is an application like Microsoft ToDo. ToDo is available on your PC, Mac, Tablet, iPad, iPhone, Android Phone, and on the web. No matter where you access that list, it updates it everywhere. Most importantly, it is a beautifully easy-to-use program:

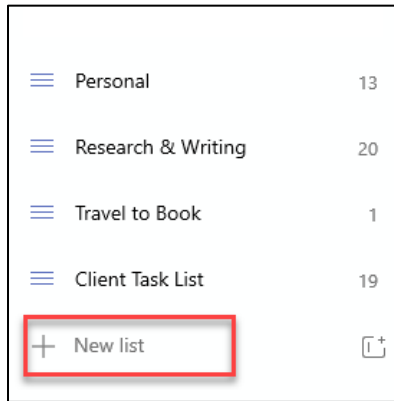




To add icing on the cake, Microsoft ToDo integrates seamlessly with Microsoft Outlook. Any task that you create in one application will be created in the other.

## ☑ **Week 11 - Do NOT Keep 20 Different Lists**

Having tasks in too many locations is a major faux pas. If you have to look in 20 places for information or tasks, you are bound to miss something. Microsoft ToDo is a great solution for this problem because you can create and organize your lists very easily. Keep your task lists simple. Here is how that looks in Microsoft ToDo:



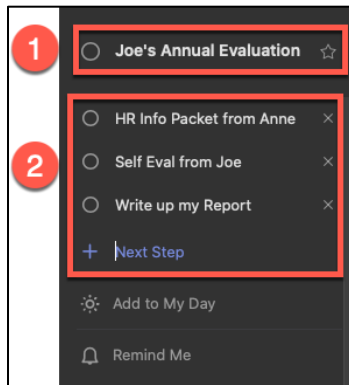
## ☑ **Week 12 - Do NOT Use Poor Descriptions in Your Task Lists!**

When you read descriptions in your task list, are they vague? Do you know exactly what you need to do next? Here is a common example of a task list that I see when I do one-on-one coaching:

- Work on the Smith Case
- Jones Hearing
- Davis Settlement
- Joe's Annual Evaluation

While you may have known what these descriptions meant when you wrote them, (1) none of them articulate exactly what next action step you must do, and (2) chances are if you know what those next steps are right now, you probably will forget those details by tomorrow or the next day. One of the primary reasons why we procrastinate is because we don't know that next step or where we left off.

Using one of the examples above, I can't start Joe's Annual Evaluation until I receive his HR information from Anne and I get Joe's self-evaluation. So, a better way to record the task is to provide the details of the next steps. This is how that would look in a task list like Microsoft ToDo:



1. Main Task Description
2. Steps or Subtasks with Detail

## ☑ **Week 13 - Do NOT Underutilize Your Calendar**

Many people simply leave tasks, deadlines, and ticklers in their task list and set up “Reminders.” While that works for some people, it doesn't work for the majority of people. Having a task on a task list is vital because it stays there until it is marked complete. However, if it is 1 of 100 other tasks, it might get lost in the weeds. Scheduling the task on your calendar is important because you can see it clearly on a particular date. That date may be the date that it is due, or the date that you are blocking off time to work on it. Having the task

in both places is important because if you fail to get something done on a certain day and it is only recorded on the calendar, you may fail to remember to do that task unless you go back and look at a previous date. If it is on your task list also, it will still be there as unresolved. This dual system is key for certain tasks that have deadlines. I don't think it is essential for all types of tasks. For instance, I would rarely, if ever, put "buy milk and eggs" on my calendar. However, if I must have a contract drafted by a certain date, I will most likely have that in my task list, in my calendar on the date that it is due, and in my calendar as an appointment with myself to work on it.

There are three categories of events that people fail to record on their calendar:

- Time Blocking - appointments with yourself to do a task.
- Ticklers - reminders to check in with someone or see if you received something from someone.
- Deadlines - hard deadlines for a project or deliverable (*e.g.*, draft a contract for the Davis case).

The bottom line is that we must get in the habit of recording tasks *and* scheduling deadlines *and* block off time to perform that work on our calendar.

**Example**—Opinion Letter on § 501(c)(3) Status of ABC Corp. This is DUE on December 1, 2020 to the client. What entries might you want to make?

- Record the task in Microsoft ToDo with the DUE DATE and a reminder 3 days before at 9 am. "ABC Corp - Opinion Letter" with all needed details in the steps or notes section. (TASK ON TASK LIST).
- Create an appointment in Outlook on December 1 at 9 am: "ABC Corp - Opinion Letter DUE to Alex Smith" (DEADLINE ON CALENDAR). You may also want to record needed deadlines within any firm-required systems, like a practice management program or a docketing system.

- Create an appointment in Outlook on November 17th from 2–5 pm to work on Opinion Letter (TIME BLOCKING).
- Create an appointment in Outlook on November 26th from 3–5 pm to finalize Opinion Letter. (TIME BLOCKING)
- Create an Appointment on November 13th to check in with associate Barb on the status of her research and opinion letter (TICKLER).

## MANAGE DISTRACTIONS

### **Week 14 - Do NOT Keep Your Outlook Inbox Up on Your Computer Monitor All Day**

Stop checking your inbox 70+ times a day! Your inbox is one of the most disruptive tools if you are trying to focus on project work, billable work, or deep level work. It's like choosing to write a complex brief or letter in a war zone or a nursery full of screaming children. Literally every 2 to 3 minutes, a bomb is landing in your inbox. How can one possibly focus while working in an environment like that? Instead, skim your calendar in the morning and decide how many times and for how long you can batch process your emails that day. Every day will be different. Aim for something reasonable like 5 times a day (the average American worker checks email an idiotic 74 times a day!).

Be more deliberate about when you check email by batch processing email, following the 3-minute rule and the 4 Ds. For instance, instead of checking email 74 times a day, you may only check it 5 times a day:

Today's Batch Email Processing	
7:30 AM	15 minutes
10:00 AM	30 minutes
12 Noon	90 minutes
4:00 pm	30 minutes
5:00 pm	15 minutes

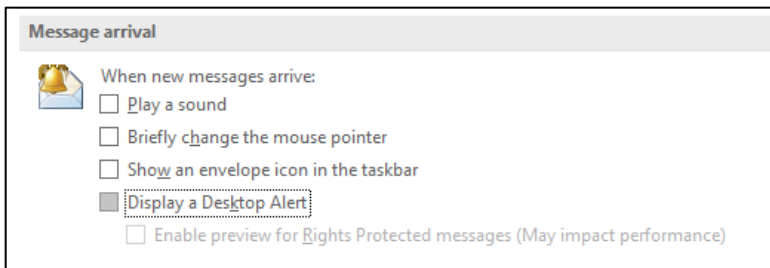
Use your dual monitors to display documents or information that is relevant to the work that you are performing, not your inbox.



## Week 15 - Do NOT Turn on Notifications

We all should be aware of the perilous cost of task-switching. Notifications are invitations to task-switch. They are like a dozen little devils sitting on our shoulder, tempting us to do everything except what we are supposed to be doing, and those devils have a direct hotline to our brain. Why would we give the world a hotline to our brain? Turn all notifications off—and I mean ALL of them, including those on your smartphones. In Outlook, email notifications can be turned off by navigating to **File > Options >**

**Mail** and deselecting the four different methods of notifying you when a new message arrives.



## ☑ **Week 16 - Do NOT Answer All Calls as They Come In**

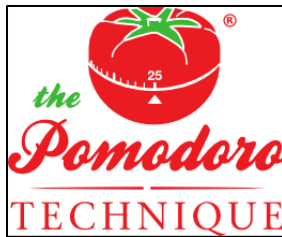
We never want to miss an important call, but you one must balance this with work that needs to be finished. If your job is sales/business development, you probably will take more calls as they come in, even from unknown callers. If your job is mostly project work, you should answer fewer calls as they come in. If you have a receptionist or use service like Smith AI virtual receptionists ([www.smith.ai](http://www.smith.ai)) Ruby Receptionists ([www.ruby.com](http://www.ruby.com)), perhaps they can field and filter these distractions. When we take calls from unknown callers, we run the risk of derailing our day by getting sucked into a conversation that we aren't prepared to resolve. It is always a little dangerous. Retrieve the message, do any needed research, and then call the person back in a timely manner with all the needed answers (batch return telephone calls, just like we should do with emails).

## **Week 17 - Do NOT Multitask!**

It is not enough to say that multitasking is bad. We need to practice single tasking. We need to clear our desks *and* our multiple monitors of information that is not directly relevant to the project that we are executing. One way to do this is using the Pomodoro Technique®. Pomodoro is an easy technique that utilizes the 25-minute tomato timer. We single-task (preferably deep-level work/project work) for 25 minutes and then take a break and do

whatever we want for 5 minutes. In other words, we work in intervals. The human brain functions very well maintaining attention to a single task for 25 minutes. After 25 minutes, we begin to lose focus. By giving ourselves a 5-minute break, we easily can return to and focus on deep-thought work for another 25 minutes. This technique will make a huge impact on productivity and will also help combat procrastination. Think about it—we can endure even the most tedious dreaded task for 25 minutes, right? Once we get a little momentum going and we get immersed in the project, it becomes a lot easier. If you feel like adjusting the time a bit, go for it. I many times go 40 minutes with a 10-minute break.

If you really like this concept, the Pomodoro Technique book is a quick read and very affordable. See <https://francescocirillo.com/pages/pomodoro-technique>.



## **Week 18 – Do NOT Juggle Tasks Without Some Juggling Tools**

Let's face it, sometimes we cannot avoid juggling emergencies. We are forced to task-switch. If you aren't one of the lucky 1-2% of the population who is a "supertasker," you better have some juggling tools at your disposal to mitigate the cost of task-switching.

### **1. Know Where You Left Off**

Have a dedicated place to write down or mark where you left off and note when you get back, "I will do \_\_x\_\_." Before jumping to another task, take 15 seconds and write down this information. For instance, I draw a little hazard icon and write down where I left

off/what I must do next. Sometimes I will even use a highlighter to draw more attention to it.



**Finish review of restrictive covenant clause, then draft Landlord Duties.**

## 2. **Quick Deep Breathing – Mind Check Before Commencing the New Task**

You don't have to commit to a 15-minute mindfulness session with yourself to experience the benefits of deep breathing. You can benefit from 15-30 seconds and you don't even need to close your eyes if you don't want to. I discuss the benefits above, but in short, even a few deep breath starts calming our amygdala in our brain.

Here's how: Shift your breathing from your chest to your belly. Breathe in slowly (a 3-count) and say the word "Relax" on your inhale and then exhale slowly and say the words "my Chest" (again on a 3-count).

Then do your best to get oriented and then dive in.

## 3. **Timer to Switch Back**

When I used to work in a restaurant kitchen, we had to juggle many things. I could have 5-10 different food items cooking at once. It was impossible to manage without timers.

With office work, we are often doing one thing and then get pulled into a telephone call or a conversation. To remember to switch back, set a timer. The easiest way is to use your smartphone:

"Hey Siri, set a timer for 15-minutes."

## 4. **Use Checklists**

If you constantly get pulled in multiple tasks, use checklists to minimize the possibility of missing



something important. It can also make more cognitive demanding tasks less cognitively demanding because you don't have to memorize as much.

## 5. **Pick Tasks That Use Different Areas of the Brain**

It isn't always possible, but if you can, pick a motor task that doesn't compete with a cognitive task.

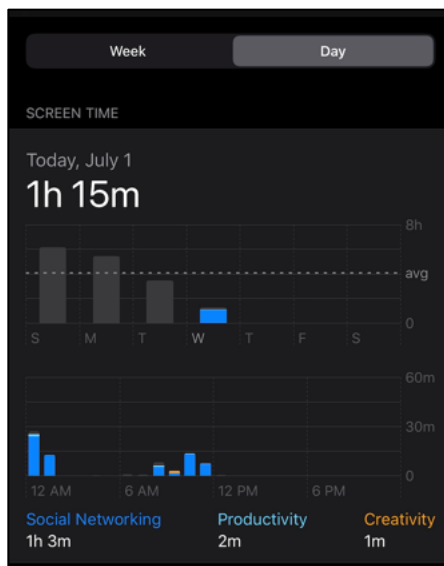
For example, applying labels on envelopes (motor task) or warming up lunch in the microwave (motor task) along with a cognitive task like returning a call to your spouse. Be careful though, you may end up microwaving your envelopes if you try too much.

### **Week 19 - Do NOT Carry Your Phone 24/7**

Let's face it, that smartphone is a ball and chain. If you don't believe me, take a "phone fast" by leaving your phone in your car's glovebox or briefcase for a half or whole day while you are at work. Let your loved ones know how to reach you at the office in case of an emergency. You will feel liberated. It is incredible how often we look at our phones during the day. It is having a terrible impact on productivity.

If for some reason, you cannot leave your phone in your briefcase, then turn off notifications on your phone and set up a VIP list for exceptions (a sick loved one at home, etc.).

Also, take advantage of screen-limiting technology. For example, on your iPhone, you can use Screen Time. Go to **Settings > Screen Time**. You can view reports about how much time you have spent on your phone, within certain apps, as well as block yourself from apps during specific hours. I do this during election season to prevent myself from engaging in useless debates on Facebook. I find it extremely effective.



## Week 20 - Do NOT Live in Social Media 24/7



Check social media 1 or 2 times at the most during the workday (unless you are engaging in business development or marketing). In fact, think about taking a 30-day “social media fast” from all social media, and I mean all of it - Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc. - ALL OF IT. It is addictive and a huge productivity zapper. Give yourself a limit of 15 minutes a day. Set boundaries for yourself.

Social media companies design their platform using incredibly manipulative techniques to draw us in. They utilize color, monitor what we are searching for on Google to customize feeds that get your attention, and worst of all, using artificial intelligence, they know exactly what kind of posts are going to pull you in (political posts, posts about hot issues, etc.). Sometimes the best way to avoid this enticement is to stay away, especially during business hours.



## Week 21 —Do NOT Micro-Manage and Solve Everyone’s Problems!

When you micro-manage people, you are inviting dozens of interruptions during the day. Empower the people that you pay to

solve problems on their own and think for themselves. When colleagues come to you and ask what they should do, or ask how to solve a problem, the first thing out of your mouth should be:

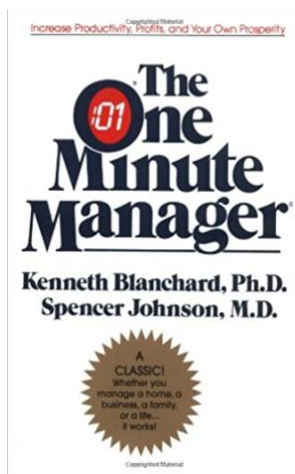
*“How do you propose that we solve this problem?”*

or

*“I want you to think about this and do a little research and present to me 2 or 3 possible solutions and then let’s talk.”*

We need to get our team members to a place where they know how to problem-solve. You need to be able to delegate those problems and trust that they get resolved. Build your team members’ confidence enough so they can make more decisions on their own, or, at a minimum, present the right recommendations to you.

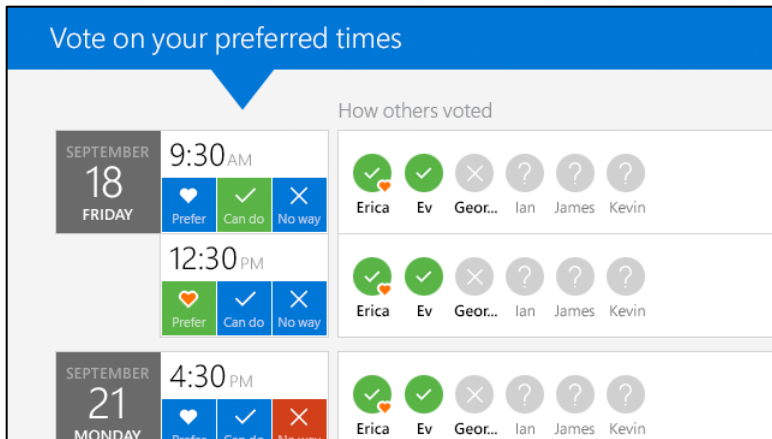
One of my favorite books on effective delegation is *The One Minute Manager* by Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson. It is available on Amazon for less than \$20.



## **Week 22 - Do NOT Create More Emails for Yourself**

Don’t create more emails for yourself from your responses. As an example, when trying to schedule an appointment with someone

or multiple people, use applications like Doodle or Microsoft FindTime, rather than asking when everyone is available to meet. Send a quick, easy-to-create poll with FindTime or Doodle where everyone can vote on their preferred times. It holds all proposed dates on your calendar as tentative until the poll is closed and you, as the organizer, can pick the final time. Then the program sends the invitation out to all participants. It makes herding cats easy as pie, and you aren't blowing up everyone's inbox with dozens of emails from the responses.



Also, to avoid getting 10 more questions from your response, don't be vague in your emails. Always think about how to resolve the email without sparking more conversation.

## **Week 23 - Do NOT Process Emails All by Yourself**

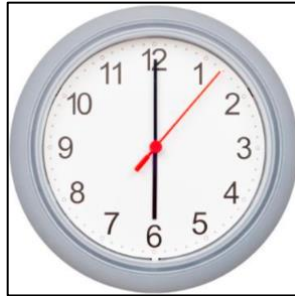
If you get a large volume of email every day, think about allowing a trusted assistant to help you process and respond to the email. I realize this may not be possible right away, and maybe never possible for some people, but if it is, you should strongly consider it. First and foremost, you need an assistant that you can trust with sensitive information. Second, you may need to set up an alternative email account so you can receive HR-related emails or emails from your partners, without your assistant having access to that content. Third, you need to contact your IT folks to have them give your assistant access. If using Outlook, only your Microsoft Exchange

administrator would be able to give these permissions to your assistant.



## **Week 24 - Do NOT Do Shallow Work First Thing in the Morning**

Many times, it is best to tackle deep-thought work early in the day when you are rested. Dive into deep-thought work like writing and projects early morning when you have the most energy. There is little question about it . . . our brains function better following quiet time or sleep. We also know that we can be highly productive while the rest of the world is sleeping because there are far fewer (if any) interruptions. This can be one of the most productive times of the day.



## GET TRAINING & GET ORGANIZED



### Week 25 - Do NOT Neglect Adequate Training

Most professionals neglect training for themselves and for their team. This happens at multiple times and on multiple levels:

- **Onboarding:** We fail to have an adequate training plan for onboarding new employees. Instead, we train our people how to drive by throwing them onto the highway.
- **Ongoing Training:** Education should never stop. That's why we have the phrase "Continuing Education." Technology never stops, new situations continuously arise, and laws are constantly changing. This means we need to stay on top of those changes and adapt.
- **Software Training:** Invest in software training whenever possible. Live onsite hands-on training is always the best, but it isn't always possible. Look at tools like [www.AffinityInsight.com](http://www.AffinityInsight.com) or [www.lynda.com](http://www.lynda.com). These solutions provide all-you-can-eat, on-demand online training for your employees, covering most of the software solutions that you use on a daily basis.
- **Process Training:** Train your people how to improve your processes, not just how to perform the existing process. This means you need to explain the "why" behind the process, in addition to the process.

At the end of the day, when people know how to do their job and the "why" behind it, they will always be able to do things more efficiently and be able to focus on the tasks with much less stress. Education and skills bring clarity and focus. Not knowing how to do something properly can be very stressful and counterproductive.

## **Week 26 - Do NOT Maintain a Paper File! Fight the Paper**

To achieve effective time, document, and email management, we have to get organized. In order to resolve email without delay, you have to be able to find an answer quickly or know where you left off. If your documents for the Jones case are scattered and you have to look in multiple locations, that is inevitably going to result in taking 5 times as long to answer the question and delay your response to the email until you have 30 minutes to find the answer. Here are common areas where information is scattered and located:

- In a paper file called “Jones, Bill - Tax Issue”
- In an inbox
- In an inbox subfolder called “Jones, Bill”
- In a folder on the S drive: S:\Clients\Jones\General
- In a folder on your laptop: My Documents\Firm Stuff\Tax Issues\Jones

In order to be organized, we absolutely must figure out how to manage digital information in one central digital location. To make matters worse, many professionals still maintain a paper file as well. It is an enormous waste of time and money to maintain a paper file. Paper files are nearly useless anyway in these post-COVID days. Only one person can access a paper file at a time, and it is extremely time consuming and costly to store all email and other information.

Bottom line: Invest in a document management system and “Fight the Paper.” Save emails into a central repository, as described above. Ultimately, all emails and documents for a project, case, or matter should be stored in one central location for everyone on the team to access. Tools like NetDocuments, Worldox, and iManage are perfect for this situation. Microsoft SharePoint may even be an option if it configured correctly.

# APPENDIX

## TDC DAILY PLANNER

The Tame the Digital Chaos (TDC) daily planner is designed to help you plan and maximize productivity on a day-to-day basis. These are undated pages that you fill out each day, as described above in **Error! Reference source not found.**, Task Management - Daily Planning. A bound print version of the planner will be available at [www.pauljunger.com](http://www.pauljunger.com) March 1, 2021, but in the interim feel free to print undated pages and fill them out daily. Here is a sample completed page. The next 2 pages contain the unfilled and undated blank form. Also consider the numerous paper-based planners on the market such as Best Self Journal, Panda, etc.

Date: 2/18/2021

PRIORITIES	
1	Review Medical Record Requests
2	Washington Settlement
3	Smith Depo
4	Prep for Retreat
5	

Jones
Smith
Dre
Davis
Settlement K
Agreed Order

GRATEFUL THOUGHTS	
1.	Mom
2.	My Health - lab results
3.	Jane - send a card today 😊

TODAY'S TIME BLOCKING	
7:00	Walk dog - short run
8:00	Business Development
9:00	Medical Records Review
10:00	Email
11:00	Smith Depo Prep
12:00	Smith Depo
1:00	
2:00	Email - Admin - Buffer - Lunch
3:00	
4:00	Washington Settlement
5:00	
6:00	Retreat Prep
7:00	Date Night + Netflix
8:00	
9:00	

NOTES	
	Appliance Repair 867-5309
	New iPhone?



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# PRIORITIES

<b>1</b>		_____
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<b>2</b>		_____
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<b>5</b>		_____
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# GRATEFUL THOUGHTS

1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____



# TODAY'S TIME BLOCKING



7:00 \_\_\_\_\_

8:00 \_\_\_\_\_

9:00 \_\_\_\_\_

10:00 \_\_\_\_\_

11:00 \_\_\_\_\_

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9:00 \_\_\_\_\_

<b>NOTES</b>	_____
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