



WORKBOOK 7

Conscious Productivity and Attention Management

Welcome to the workbook for Module 7 of the Agents of Conscious Business course, with David Allen!

The aim of this class was to clarify what has your attention and get it out of your head so you can engage your mind and your attention more consciously and more powerfully.

The points that were covered:

- Paying attention to what has your attention
- Getting stuff out of your head so you can get around to the important things
- How to get things under control and figure out what's most important

This workbook is going to make most sense if you have listened to the recording of the class for module 7.

You can either listen to the whole thing and then dive into this workbook, or do it in parallel, pausing the recording to work on an exercise, and then listening to the next bit.

The Five Big Ideas from the Class

Here are what we think were the five big ideas from the class with David:

1 – The magic of the mundane

Conscious business often feels like something we can only really consider and do when we quiet all the noise and get away from the busy-ness of our daily lives and work. But what if conscious business (also) meant being at the very center of all of that noise and overwhelm and fully embracing it?



That's what David calls 'the magic of the mundane'. It's about bringing awareness and attention to the process of doing and working itself. And it starts with paying attention to what has your attention. Paying attention to the stuff that's on your mind, and that's distracting you from being as creative, clear and conscious as you might like to be.

2 – Your mind is for having ideas, not for holding them

There is an inverse relationship between 1) how much you're thinking of something, and 2) how much you're getting it done. If something is pulling on you, it's going to psychically knock on your door again and again until you finish your thinking around it and park the results of that thinking in a trusted place.

That's all that Getting Things Done is: a methodology for getting all of the stuff that's on your mind, out of your head. To not have the same thought twice, unless you like the thought. Because if you do, it means you did not engage appropriately with that 'thing' the first time it showed up, and it will take up 'psychic RAM' until you do.

Why do all of that? Because your mind is for having ideas, not for holding them. Because of the strategic value of *clear space*. To have the freedom to have nothing on your mind so you can then consciously choose to direct your attention and use your mind for what's most important, without being distracted by anything else.

3 – The 5 stages of getting things under control

So how do you do that? How do you go from being overwhelmed and out of control about things to getting them under control and on 'cruise control'? David has identified five stages that everyone goes through to get anything under control, whether it's your kitchen, a country, or a conversation. These are natural behaviors, but that doesn't mean they're normal!

- 1) Capture: identify everything that has your attention
- 2) Process: decide what those things mean to you
- 3) Organize: park the results of your thinking appropriately, so you don't have to keep re-thinking them
- 4) Review: step back and look at the bigger picture regularly to keep your system functional
- 5) Engage: consciously decide where you point your attention and resources in the moment

4 – The power of thinking in outcomes and next-actions

What the processing stage aims to do is to help us 'finish our thinking'. Rather than letting things continue to bounce around our heads, we capture them to get them out and figure out what it actually means. Most to-do lists are nothing but incomplete lists of still unclear things (e.g. 'Mom').



What does that mean to me? Do I need to do something about it? If so, what would 'done' look like? (What's the outcome) And what would 'doing' look like? (What's the next-action)

Most people have between 30 and a 100 projects, and between 150 and 220 next actions. That's quite an inventory, but apparently that's more or less all the stuff you turn out to have on our mind if you really sit down and think about it! And it's going to own you, unless you free yourself from it by getting it out of your head so you can look at it and make conscious decisions about all of it.

You better understand *what* they are, *park* them appropriately based on what they *mean*, and regularly step back and *reflect* on all of that so that you can feel good about what you're not doing. That's the only way you get free and clear. If you don't name it and park it appropriately, it will own you.

5 – The 6 horizons of focus and perspective

So if you have all of that out of your head and under control, how do you do then figure out what's most important? In addition to control, David identified one other key piece that's needed to make this work: perspective. He distinguishes between six levels or horizons at which we can have commitments. You can think of these as conversations that you have with yourself, and that you need to get clear on in order to gain appropriate perspective:

- Level 5: Why are you on the planet? (purpose and principles)
- Level 4: What would wild success look like if you were fulfilling your purpose? (vision)
- Level 3: What do you need to accomplish in the next year or two, to make your vision come about? (goals)
- Level 2: What are all the areas of focus and responsibility that you need to maintain at a certain level, in terms of your job, your health, your finances, your relationships, etc. (areas of focus and responsibility)
- Level 1: All the projects that you have about all of that (projects)
- Ground level: All the actions you need to take (actions)

If you're wondering about how to set priorities, look at which conversation you need to have with yourself to clarify what's most important at all of those six levels. Because that's how incredibly complex and subtle our lives are, and it's all implicit until you start to tease it apart and look at it consciously. Only then will you be in a position to make conscious choices about it all.



Getting it all out of your head

Big ideas need solid grounding. Want to take some of the big ideas around conscious business and put them into practice? If you're participating in this course and reading this, we suspect the answer is 'yes' ;-)

There is one thing that you can do now that is going to have huge impact. Start paying attention to everything that has your attention. Get it out of your head, so you can look at it and make some conscious choices about what's most important and how you want to use your precious energy and attention.

You'll remember stage 1 is to capture everything that's on your mind. To collect all the stuff that's 'unfinished business'. During the call David guided us through a short exercise called a 'mind sweep'. That's where we'll start. If you've done it already, this is a great opportunity to get some more practice.

Exercise!

This exercise is best done when you have at least 30 minutes of uninterrupted time. You'll probably need more space than we generally provide for in the workbook, so why don't you get some fresh paper (and a pen).

For this exercise, let's focus on one area: this course. If anything else comes up, that's fine, just jot that down to get it out of your head, but see if you can keep coming back to the course.

The following list of questions is designed to trigger stuff that you may have on your mind and in your head. Just read over them and start jotting down anything that has your attention, anything that you need to or want to do something with.

- When you think about the course so far, what has your attention?
- Any things you want to do something with?
- Remember these are not commitments of any kind – you're just emptying your 'psychic RAM', in any order, one item per line.
- What's unfinished about the classes you've joined or listened to so far?
- What have you started, that is not completed yet?
- What do you want to get started?
- What promises or commitments have you made with yourself about the course?
- Anything you want to read or write?
- Stuff you've been wanting to look at?



- Grab your copies of the workbooks you've engaged with so far – is there anything in there that's unfinished or that triggers stuff for you?
- What about your notebook? Made any notes on the course, or on things you want to look into or do something with?
- Did anything come up that you made a mental note on? Anything to research?
- What have you done with the material so far? Has anything been different about how you've engaged at work? With colleagues? In conversations or meetings? Anything about all of that you need to capture?
- Look at the learning objectives you defined in Module 1. If you read over those, does that trigger anything that's unfinished or on your mind?
- Now zoom out and think about the last two modules. Anything you need to remember or do something about?
- Anything else you want to capture before we move on?

Great work! Now take a few deep breaths and finish the following sentence.

Having done the mind sweep exercise, what I notice about how I'm feeling is:

Now let's move on and see if we can clarify and process all of this 'stuff'. You can either pick 5 to 10 things that most have your attention from the list, or go through the entire list, depending on how much time you want to spend on this.

Remember though, that this not just an exercise to practice the principles of Getting Things Done – this is stuff that's *actually* on your mind, and that's going to come knocking again and again until you figure out what it all means and what you want to do with it!

Grab two fresh pieces of paper (one for Projects and one for Next-Actions), and for each item you're going to process, answer the following questions:

- Is this actionable? Is there anything you want to do with this? If not, you may want to look at the handout 'Workflow Processing and Organizing' that's available on the [Academy website](#), to figure out what to do with non-actionable stuff. For more information on this, we highly recommend getting David's original book, *Getting Things Done*. It's practical and totally worth getting.



- If it is actionable, what can you finish about this? What would your successful outcome look like for this? Capture that on your Projects sheet. Some examples of Project verbs: finalize, clarify, look into, organize, ensure, implement, resolve, set up, handle, maximize, etc.
- If it's a really simple thing, a single action step, just double check for a moment: will that one step actually finish your commitment about this? Will that get it off your mind? If so, capture it on your Next-Action sheet. If not, you may have identified another project! Remember, a project is anything that takes more than one step to finish. Some examples of Next-Action verbs: call, buy, draft, email, print, draft, read, talk to, google, etc.

Nice. Depending on how many items you just processed, you should have at least some things written down on both your projects sheet and your next-actions sheet. Now grab your project sheet and answer the following question:

- For each project, what is the very next action? If you didn't have anything to do right now except that thing, what would you do? Again, remember to use an (action) verb, and write the next-action down on your next-actions sheet.

If you continue to practice the habit of getting stuff out of your head and clarifying outcomes and next-actions, you will find yourself becoming a lot clearer and effective. However, to really go the distance, you'll need to find a way of reliably organizing your projects and actions (as well as any non-actionable stuff you identified) in what David calls a 'trusted system'.

Figuring out what that trusted system should look like for you is beyond the scope of this workbook, but again you'll find David's book *Getting Things Done* a valuable resource for this, and if you Google 'GTD' you should find a ton of resources.

Figuring out what's most important

In the meantime, you may be wondering what to do with the lists you've created. If there's a lot of stuff on there, how do you figure out what's most important? We have a measure of control – now what we need next is some focus and perspective.

Take a minute to look at the six horizons of focus we covered earlier as one of the five big ideas, and then answer the following two questions.



Which of these six levels (level 5 all the way down to the ground level) is clearest in your life? And how does that show up in your life and work?

Which of these six levels is *least* clear in your life? And how does *that* show up in your life and work?

This would be a great time to get out a quick first iteration of what your six horizons of focus look like. As for your list of course-related projects and next-actions, you might want to look again at your learning objectives (goals, i.e. level 3) to get a sense of what's most important right now.

If you have at least a basic version of control and perspective, the final piece is maintenance, which is the weekly review. Again, there's much more to say on this topic (mostly very well said by David), but here's a short version of what you might want to look at every week (at a fixed day and time, so it becomes a ritual).

Weekly review checklist:

- 1) Get clear
 - Collect loose papers, notes, and other 'stuff'
 - Get all of your 'inboxes' to zero (email, desk, notebooks, etc.)
 - Empty your hear (e.g. by using a trigger list such as the one in this workbook)
- 2) Get current
 - Review your next-action list(s)
 - Review the past and upcoming few weeks in your calendar
 - Review project list(s) (evaluate status and identify new next-actions if necessary)
- 3) Get creative
 - Review your horizons of focus to see if you need or want to create any new projects
 - Be creative and courageous: any crazy new ideas you want to capture and track?



That's it for this class "Conscious Productivity and Attention Management"! We hope to see you all in Module 8 with Rand Stagen. As always, you'll find more info on that class on the [Academy website](#).

If you have any comments or questions, please email us at mail@wakinguptheworkplace.com or throw a comment on the Academy website page for [Module 7](#).