

# Zen To Done

## Introduction

Zen To Done is a time and task management method created by Leo Babauta at [www.zenhabits.net](http://www.zenhabits.net) which is based on the GTD ([Getting Things Done](#)) philosophy. These productivity tips are simple and useful because all you need to get started is a pen, a small notebook, and the good habits listed here. Leo Babauta recommends that instead of putting all of these habits into practice at once, that you take 30 days per step and acquire each of them in order.

## Habit 1: Collect information and write it down before you forget

(<http://zenhabits.net/2007/04/ztd-habit-1-collect/>)

We get most ideas at the wrong moment – while drying our hair, catching the bus, or in a meeting. If we do not capture these thoughts, they slip away, and we are left scratching our heads, trying to recall the brilliant brainstorm we had this morning. It's not just the big ideas we want to capture, either, it's small tasks too - those little to-dos that keep you awake at night. So the first habit is to *\*always\** carry a small notebook and write down *\*all\** ideas, projects, telephone numbers and other thoughts that come to mind.

You can find more on note-taking at: <http://zenhabits.net/2007/02/tips-for-gtds-ubiquitous-capture/>.



## Habit 2: Process your notes

*Don't let mail and tasks become a burden. Instead become their master and get them to zero.*

<http://zenhabits.net/2007/04/inbox-master-get-all-your-inboxes-to-zero-and-have-fewer-inboxes/>

Make swift decisions about your e-mails or things you've written down and don't put them off! Process your inbox at least once every day, more if you need to, but be careful not to let this become an obsession. Go through each of the items from top to bottom leaving none of them out and make one of these decisions in each case:

- Delete (If you don't need it, get rid of it immediately)
- Delegate (Should you deal with this task? Does it have anything to do with you?)
- Do it now if it will take less than 2 minutes
- Do it later if it's going to take more than 2 minutes, put it on the 'To Do' list *\*immediately\**, or write it down in your diary
- Archive
- Whatever you do, leave nothing in your inbox

Additional links:

**How to clear your inbox effectively –**

<http://zenhabits.net/2007/01/email-zen-clear-out-your-inbox/>

**Three steps to putting your desk in order –**

<http://zenhabits.net/2007/01/steps-to-permanently-clear-desk/>



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## Habit 3: Plan

Devise a plan for the coming week

**\*Begin\*** by knowing the Big Rocks (major things) you want to achieve. <http://zenhabits.net/2007/04/big-rocks-first-double-your-productivity-this-week/> These are the critical, but not always urgent items that tend to get pushed back – like going to the gym, launching a new website, writing a report. Push your long-term aims forward. Choose days in the week when you want to do this and leave a one to two hour window when you can be sure you have all the time you need to take care of these tasks.

Don't plan for too many Big Rocks. Start with four to six every week. That's as much as is necessary. Even if you know there are a lot of really important matters that – to date – you have been putting off to the not-too-closely-defined future, it's enough to gradually make a start and make some small but resolute steps to get the rocks rolling. You don't have to achieve everything in one go. Try to seize the day by kicking the Big Rocks early on in the day.

Every day, know the three most important tasks (Most Important Tasks – MIT <http://zenhabits.net/2007/02/purpose-your-day-most-important-task/>) and do all you can to get them done.

## Habit 4: Act

*Acting is more important than any system of planning. Task lists are no use at all, if you don't put them into effect.*

One key habit of ZTD (Zen To Done) – if you want to hit high productivity then do tasks **\*one by one\***. Choose one task and give it your full concentration until it is completed. Turn off your e-mail programs. Switch off the phone.

Disconnect from the Internet. If someone interrupts you or asks you for something, write it down in your notebook and then go back to what you were doing. Avoid multitasking <http://zenhabits.net/2007/02/how-not-to->

[multitask-work-simpler-and/](#). Whenever you feel the need to check your mail or to move to another task, don't. Take a deep breath and concentrate on the task in hand.

If you have a problem getting started on a task:

- Do it on the assumption that at any moment it's essential to get the first five minute's of work done – you can do the rest another time
- Work on the first step instead of thinking of the task as a whole. All you have to do is to put on your boots and go through the door. Once you've done that the rest will be relatively easy
- Look for the passion
- Don't focus on the negative aspects.

## Habit 5: A Simple system

Don't waste time on over-organizing your tasks. Use a simple list that you look at every day and process it according to Habit 2 (Processing your notes). Don't make complicated systems. Don't try to find more refined tools. It's a waste of time. If you acquire the habit of looking at the list at regular intervals, you won't need to tag anything or to transfer elements from one list to another.

Remember: putting a task down on a list doesn't mean that you have to do it. Lists are only a source of ideas for Big Rocks and Most Important Tasks (MITs).

If you prefer, you can set up lists by context: @work, @phone, @home and a someday/maybe list.





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### Habit 6: Organize

Put everything back where it belongs. Keep everything that is sent to you in one place. Process these things according to Habit 2 Don't allow yourself to get buried by the sheer amount of mail.

### Habit 7: Review

Review your goals every week. See how far you got in reaching your annual, long-term and lifelong aims. To avoid distraction, don't work on more than one long-term goal at any one time. Know the nearest short-term step that is part of the long-term one. This should be something you can achieve in one or two hours. Start your week's plan with this and with knowing what the Big Rocks are. Draw a line through things you have done or things that are no longer relevant.

### Habit 8: Simplify

*"Besides the noble art of getting things done, there is a noble art of leaving things undone. The wisdom of life consists in the elimination of the nonessentials." - Lin Yutang*

Reduce the list of aims and tasks to the essentials. If you want to do everything, you will quickly get overloaded and you'll forget about the Most Important Tasks. ZTD means deleting less important items at regular intervals <http://zenhabits.net/2007/02/top-10-productivity-hacks-4/>.

Eliminate, eliminate, and eliminate again. Set about eliminating half of your tasks every few days (some are out-of-date, some have been done and some have turned out not to need to be done).

The most straightforward approach is to concentrate on what is most important – identify one long-term goal and work towards it.

If you really want to work on more than one major aim at the same time – OK, but make sure it's no more than two or three.

Group small tasks together. During the day a lot of tasks build up, such as writing mails and answering the telephone, which can be put off until later. Set a time, such as half an hour in the late afternoon, and do them all at once.



### Habit 9: Procedures

Develop procedures that make it easier for you to be better organized.

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