

Youâ€™re organized when you get more important shit done

Description

My mind is a bag of squirrels

I have trouble focusing most of the time. My ability to drift off in a conversation is legendary. I have so many random thoughts running through my head at any given moment itâ€™s a wonder I can finish a sentence. And then in other moments, I can do things like write this blog and lose track of time Iâ€™m so focused. Do you struggle to stay on top of things? Do you look at your to-do list at the end of the day and see most of what you wrote in the morning is still unfinished, with 10 other things added to it? If so, then read on. If not, write to me and tell me your secret so I can steal it shamelessly.

Iâ€™ve spent a lot of energy trying to organize my life to get more done with the precious time I have. Not all successfully, but what Iâ€™ve learned so far has helped tame the squirrels in my head.

Stephen Covey in all his glory



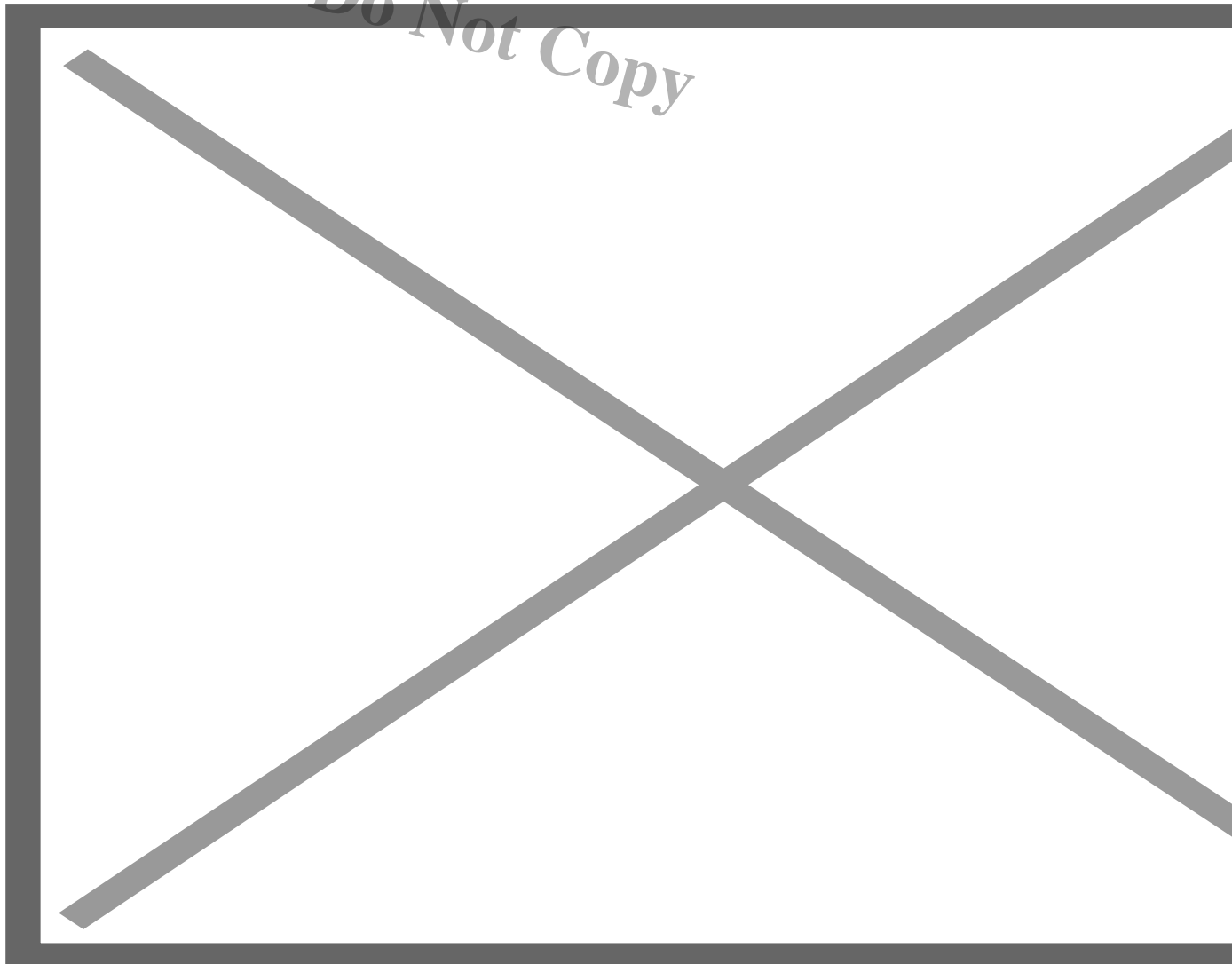
One of the earliest books I read on organizing the mess in my head was [The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R. Covey](#). If you've never read it, take the time. It's well worth it; The foundations of beginning with the end in mind, and the principle of urgent vs important work are essential to getting more valuable work done day in and day out.

In the years before smartphones and iPads (yes I'm that old) I lived and died by my FranklinCovey paper planner, where I laid out in lots of detail my vision, mission, goals, monthly and daily tasks. I prioritized in A, B, C, and 1,2,3 priorities my tasks, to do my important work before my nice-to-have tasks.

To this day I still get a warm fuzzy feeling when I come across my old planner in my boxes in the basement.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

Knowing a bit about what you want to achieve and become vs exploring and discovering



When I was little, I wanted to be a pilot, like my dad, and then an astronaut, an astronomer, and astrophysicist (seeing a trend?), a software developer, a painter, a rock star, a goalie for the Montreal Canadiens, and the head of NASA. None of that happened of course, but I did always have a future me that I was working on in some way. I was in high school and I knew I was going to be an engineer, something about it clicked. And in my head astronaut, pilot, etc. was still possible after.

Knowing a bit about where you want to be (begin with the end in mind) can really help organize and focus your actions. If you're running a department, it could be something like improving efficiency in the next year or increasing sales by 20%, or maybe it's learning a new skill, language, or leadership attribute. Maybe you want to get into app development or become a nurse. Whatever excites you and what you want tomorrow to look like, take some time and really think about it and visualize that end state. Then work backward to today and make a plan to get from today to that future state of you. Break it down into monthly, weekly goals to set that you can track and follow.

Share it with someone, your team, a colleague, or your spouse. Ask them to help you be accountable and check on your tasks and whether you're sticking to it. It's easier to let yourself off the hook alone than to tell it to someone else and feel the shame.

Sometimes though, and I believe in this more and more, you don't know exactly what you want to achieve. Look at my list as a kid. I was way off. And it's ok. In fact, I've come to believe that what is really effective is knowing what to explore, more than knowing the end state.

For example, you may know that your business is suffering through this Covid pandemic. You know you need to find new sales opportunities to survive. Should you set a goal of \$5M in extra revenue or find 5 new potential customers to establish a relationship with?

It's clear you need more revenue, but you honestly won't know which customer will provide it before doing the work. So your action plan should simply focus on what you're going to do today to explore your options and reach out to as many customers as you can. Then you will know better where the new sales will come from. But I guarantee whatever number you put up as a target won't be the number you hit. So it doesn't really matter.

One other interesting topic on the subject of goals. An inspiring coach of mine, Robert Shereck, often talked about the "Bold Promise". What he said was that it was important to set goals that are way beyond the ordinary "improve efficiency by 5%". As leaders, we need to pick goals that are bold but not impossible. Things like JFK's promise to go to the moon and back within the decade. When a leader makes a stand like that it inspires everyone to be really creative and performing in ways no one ever thought was possible. It changes people's frame of reference.

There is real merit to it also. Your team may not reach the exact goal you set to achieve but you will achieve way more than you ever thought possible. So sometimes setting a very bold goal for yourself and committing to it can also focus your actions and be amazingly productive. For example, if you've dreamed of starting a business for years, then committing to launching a business in 6 months can sharpen your focus and get it done. Maybe it takes 9 months instead, but it's still faster than the 10 years you've been talking about it, right?

More than a to do list

I had a guy in my team once, who ran non-stop like the Energizer Bunny. He was always on the go and getting things done. He had a black notebook that we wrote all his to-do's in, and it was just this long list of shit in no particular order as it came at him. Have you ever known someone like this? He looks really productive, crossing off things almost as fast as he adds them. He even spoke faster than everyone else, sometimes so fast no one actually understood what he said.

The problem was he took everything on and tackled it all with the same energy no matter what it was. He was really unproductive in his actual responsibilities. He had no sense of prioritization, and he really got off on taking on everything and being really busy, he never stopped to think if what he was accomplishing was really the most important things. It's not enough to simply keep track of your tasks, you need to decide if what you're writing on your to-do's is even worth your valuable time doing.

And that is the real secret. Knowing what is important to do yourself, to delegate, to ignore, and to just say no to.

Bullet journaling

<https://bulletjournal.com/>

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A couple of years ago I stumbled across this site extolling the benefits of something called Bullet Journaling. Having used my FranklinCovey journal for years, and trying to digitize with Evernote, OneNote and so many others, I was intrigued. The first thing I loved was it was a very tactile return to paper. The second thing was that it was dead simple to learn and use. And the third thing was that it was very customizable.

I've now been using it for about 2 years, and I have to say it's almost perfect for me in organizing my priorities. Because it's very customizable I've been able to incorporate some of the Stephen Covey concepts and have pages for goals, and vision, as well as the usual Month, day and other pages in the Bullet Journal theme.

Give it a try and let me know how it works for you.

What's the story Morning Glory?

Before I give you a long-winded explanation of how important your mornings are to be more organized, I have to say I absolutely hate getting up early. One more slam of the snooze bar is usually my first thought when the alarm goes off. Having said that, I have gotten so much out of being up earlier than the rest of my family and having some time to myself to set up the day.

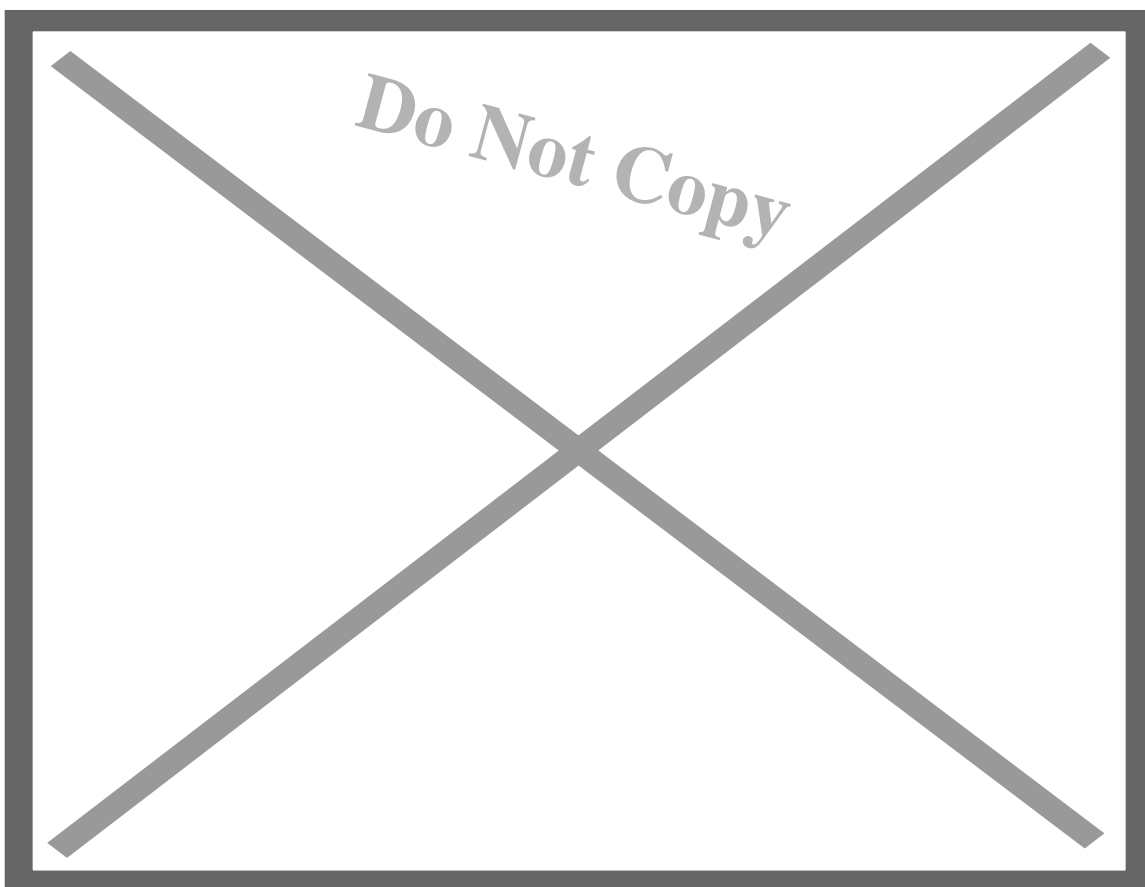
When you get up early, and sit in silence and just think about your day then you are already halfway to becoming more productive. Being intentional about what you do means you focus on only what's important; and simply thinking about what you're going to do before you do it gives you that opportunity to get it right.

I try to start every morning with meditation, then planning with my bullet journal what I want to accomplish every day. I take 5 minutes to journal a quick reflection on the previous day's wins and losses, and to remind myself of my priorities. Then my to do list is targeted on what matters most to me and my business.

There was a great book that helped me structure this and build the right habits slowly, called [Atomic Habits](#) by James Clear. Among other things, it has a great method to build up a fantastic morning routine slowly that will last.

As you grow in these habits, your mornings give you space to reflect, adjust and repeat until your intentionally organized habits allow you to get more done of what matters.

Say no more often



The last piece of advice I'll give on this subject is about saying no. I used to have a big problem with this because I am a people pleaser at heart and want to support everyone that comes my way. The big downside of this is that soon enough you have way too much on your plate than you can handle.

When you become clear on your priorities, protect them like your life depends on them. Don't let anyone else throw something on the top of your pile that you don't agree is more important. The only way to do that, unfortunately, is to say no to those requests. Obviously, some people can't be told no (you boss), but you can negotiate on almost anything.

If your boss wants something “right away”, offer how fast you think you can do it without sacrificing your priorities. You will be surprised how often they say yes to that.

It takes some practice, but with all these tools I’m convinced you can be more productive at the things that matter to you and feel more organized every day.

Category

1. Uncategorized

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