



RT: Hey folks, Richard Tubb here with a very special interview for the 50th episode of TubbTalk. I could not be more excited for our guest today. To call him a best-selling author and a world-famous speaker would be to severely undersell his impact.

Released in 2001, his first book, 'Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity' became more than just a book. The GTD methodology has become a movement, with everyone from business leaders to musicians and artists using GTD to become better at what they do.

On a personal level, for me, GTD is one of the three books that I cite as life changing for me, and that's a term I don't use lightly. I can say from being one of the world's biggest procrastinators, GTD has enabled me to build successful businesses and more than that, has given me the confidence to fulfil a lot of my personal potential.

It's with absolute great pleasure and an honour that I'm joined today by David Allen. David, welcome to TubbTalk.

DA: Richard, delighted to be here. Thanks for the invitation.

RT: My pleasure. Now, I'm at home in Newcastle upon Tyne. So, if I wave and you squint, you should just be able to see me from across the water in Amsterdam. How long have you lived in the Netherlands now?

DA: Almost five years now - four and a half.

RT: You and your wife Catherine were very kind to host me and my wife Claire when we were in Amsterdam a few months ago. It's a beautiful part of the world, and I could definitely see why you like living there. What prompted the move from The States?

DA: We wanted to get out of the state and figured Europe was the target destination. We've been to Amsterdam two or three times already, and had fallen in love with the city. As you know, it's an eye candy city. And frankly, it's cheaper than London and warmer than Stockholm.

It has more interesting skies, then Berlin or Copenhagen. So, there were a lot of factors, but we didn't know how long we were gonna stay here, but we were courting it to begin with, and then totally fell in love. We're still in love with the city.

The quality of life here is fabulous. And it's really much more the centre of my world than Santa Barbara, California was, given the fact that GTD has gone somewhat global these days so

RT: America's loss is our gain. I'm glad you glad you just across the water.

DA: Well, somehow, we had an intuition that maybe it was time to go to the source of where America really came from, a few blocks where I live.

RT: When we got together in Amsterdam earlier this year, I shared a little bit of my story, of how you and GTD have influenced my life for the better. Many of my listeners will actually be familiar with GTD, as is it's a very popular productivity methodology within the IT industry, something I talk about a lot.

But if somebody hasn't heard of GTD, if they've been living under a rock, how would you describe GTD to people?

DA: It's a sort of best practices that are simple to do, but they don't happen automatically. And if you learn to do them, and do them consistently, it creates more of a sense of control, more of a sense of focus, and creates more cognitive space to focus on whatever you consider the most meaningful things.

It's not like a foreign language or some new technology, it's really simple, basic moves, that everybody knows how to do: write stuff down, decide next actions, you create lists, and review the list, make sure you locate yourself in space and time and you're doing the right stuff.

It's like a big 'Duh!' It's common sense, anybody who keeps a calendar or anybody keeps a Post-It on their fridge to keep track of food they need to buy at the store is already doing and

building some sort of an external brain to externalise all this, because your head's just a crappy office.

I just figured out the algorithm of how to get stuff out of your head without having to finish it, and be able to then engage with it and free your head up to do what it does much better, which is access your intuition and your intelligence, than to try to remember and remind. The cognitive scientists have now validated all that, but I just discovered it on the street 35 years ago and built that into the methodology.

RT: You refer to it as 'duh' which undersells it if I may say, but it is a very simple concept, isn't it, to clear things out of your head to give you the mental space to actually get on and do the things that you that you want to do, to focus on the important.

DA: And it also defuses what causes a lot of procrastination. A lot of procrastination starts because people are not sure what to do next, and are afraid. They don't want to make a wrong move, and they don't know what to do yet.

Deciding what to do actually takes thinking and decision making. So, I just figured, what's the thinking process and the decision-making process you need to apply to that email, letter or idea you came up with in order to be able to then get those out of your head and actually make them much easier to engage with?

It lowers the barrier of entry to engage with your world, and I just figured out that algorithm.

RT: I refer to myself, historically, as the world's biggest procrastinator, and I think a lot of people will probably empathise with that title. When I read GTD for the first time, probably within the first year of the book being released, it was a spooky feeling.

I actually thought you were peering over my shoulder and saying, "OK." It was life-changing from that perspective, and I'm not the only person to say that because they've read the book and it's made such a profound impact.

At the opposite end of the scale, I've worked with some business owners who for want of a better description, revel in 'being busy' and they wear it like a badge of honour - I'm sure you've come across people like this.

When I suggest GTD to them, with a view to clearing their mind and concentrate on what's actually important, they go ahead and buy the book, which is good for you, David, but they don't actually read it, or not initially.

The best analogy is being overweight, you buy a gym membership to make you feel better, but then you never actually go along to it. If you were to suggest just one GTD activity to those type of people to help them see the impact and spur them into reading the rest of the book, what would you say that activity could be?

DA: I'd make it two different things that they could do in 30 seconds. Ask yourself, quite honestly, what are the things that are on your mind? What has your attention right now – a project, a problem, situation, circumstance, opportunity?

When you sit down to rest and close the door, what pops into your mind? That's either something you're worried or concerned about, know you need to think about, do something or decide something about.

Make a list of those first 10 things that pop into your head, then go through each one of them one at a time and say, "Well, if I had nothing else to do but get closure or resolution on that thing? Where would I go right now? What's the very next action I would take? Would I surf the web? Would I talk to my life partner? would I go buy something at the hardware store?"

What's the very next action if that's the only thing you had to do to get closure on whatever its is? Answer that question and write those down, watch what would happen if you did that, and how you feel.

I guarantee you, you'll have more sense of focus, more of a sense of control, and some part of your brain's going to go, "Ah, OK. I now know what to do". Thinking is hard to do, let's get real. It takes it's a cognitive muscle you actually have to train, to train yourself to make next action decisions about things that have your attention.

First of all, identifying what has your attention is one big habit to install. The second thing is to make sure that if it's an actionable item, you decide what the action is. And if you really want to get enthralled and have a fabulous thing, take the next minute and say, "Well, one action won't finish this, what's the project?"

How would you title the project that you are committed to complete and check off based upon that problem, opportunity or situation? Action and outcome are really the zeros and ones of productivity anyway.

What are we trying to accomplish, and how do we allocate resources to make that happen? That's a real cognitive muscle to train, because it turns out that those require two different parts of your brain.

The outcome thinking requires the fore-brain, the frontal cortex, and the action decision goes to the limbic part of you, which is the execution piece. It's the part that gets up and moves, hunts and gathers and all that stuff. You can train yourself to make those decisions as a more habitual process, as you probably know, but you're not born doing that.

RT: Absolutely. While you're saying that, I've been doing GTD for forever now, and I feel as though I know the GTD process, and yet, this morning, just before we came on this call, I felt a bit overwhelmed.

I'm in the middle of a period of travel, and yet what you've just said about going straight back to the core of it, which is I'm trying to juggle things in my head. Here's a big question for you that, hopefully, will have a simple answer. Do you ever get overwhelmed?

DA: Yes, all the time. I just don't stay there.

RT: And do you use those techniques that we've just talked about?

DA: Of course. I eat my own dog food like crazy. That's how it came up with all this stuff. I came up with a model for myself to begin with, turned around and, started using it with all my clients in my consulting practice and it turned out it produced exactly the same results it did for me.

So I've kept it in my act, and over the last 35 years, the basics of it really haven't changed, but it's been very much refined in terms of, how I've understood how sublime and subtle it is. I've also found better ways to describe it to people and what the process is.

RT: You talk about making things habitual, and I'd like just like to jump into that for a minute. Presumably at some point in the past, you realised that there was a pattern occurring, "Hey, I'm getting overwhelmed, and the way out of this is to do X, Y and Z."

How did you build that trigger in so that instead of flapping around and going, "I'm feeling overwhelmed, I don't know what to do," it became habitual? You said, "Fine, I'm going to grab a pen and paper and I'm going to empty my head."

DA: I didn't come at it from an "I'm in pain, and here's my resolution" position, I came at it because, as I began my own consulting practice, I ran across a guy who became a mentor of mine for a couple of years.

He himself had uncovered the 'get it out of your head, decide next action process', and working many executives and working at organisational change, he found that that was absolutely critical to begin with, to help clear the deck and make change possible in terms of thinking.

Dean shared that with me, and he had me do that process. I didn't feel like I was in bad shape, but he had me sit down and empty my head to decide next actions, and I went, "Oh, my God, what a cool feeling that is!" I didn't realise how much pressure there was on me, because I couldn't have described myself as feeling overwhelmed at the time.

But, as I discovered the process, I went, "Oh, my God". And then I went around started to share that same thing, because it creates such clear space, and I was very much into clear space, meditation and martial arts and so forth.

I already had that inclination of it being really cool. The more you can get clear and let your mind be absolutely free to be spontaneous, to engage with four people jumping in a dark alley, or painting a painting or whatever to clear the space.

I didn't realise how much unclear space there was, until Dean walk me through this. And I went, "Oh, my God, that is really, really cool!" As I started using it with not only for myself, but with my clients, it's really embarrassing, but if you really want to learn something, to build a habit, teach it. You feel really embarrassed if you're not doing what you teach.

I wound up being thrust into the corporate training world, because somebody at a very senior level actually at Lockheed saw what I was doing and they said, "Wow, can you design a programme around this so that we can reach a lot of people?" So I did and it worked.

I wound up being thrust into the corporate training world, and then, of course, it's really embarrassing if you don't do this stuff, because you're standing in front of 500 people and training them how to do something.

It's a real good idea that you demonstrate what you're talking about and model it. In a way, it didn't take very long for me to just say, "That is absolutely the way to function".

RT: I want to jump back to something we mentioned earlier on. I said that GTD is being used by everyone from teachers and, this is where people get surprised, to artists and musicians.

These are the people that you'd typically think of as rebelling against structure in favour of wild creativity. Why is GTD so popular with creative sorts, if I can lump them all in together?

DA: Well, for one thing, it's a very, very flexible, open system. It's not something that says, "This is how you have to do that and you have to follow x, y and z". There are certain basic principles that are inviolate. In other words, if something's in your head, it's in the wrong place.

But how you get it out of your head that's totally up to you. You can write it on your arm, you can write it on toilet paper, you can record it, you can hire 43 people, who just follow you around, you can talk to them, and let them remind you back when you need it.

There are all kinds of ways to get it out of your head. So, it's highly flexible in that way. And at the same time, it does automatically create a whole lot more space. Now, I have to say that a lot of the creatives that are huge fans of my stuff, people like Robert Downey, Jr, Will Smith or Howard Stern, these guys, are running major businesses in addition to their entertainment spend in terms of what they do.

These guys are some of the busiest people you'll ever meet on the planet, and those are the people that tend to take the GTD. It's funny that the people who need it the least are most attracted to it, because it's the people who are already productive, creative, aspirational, already forward-thinking, that are throwing themselves out of their own comfort zone, given their own productivity and creativity.

Most of them just have some improvements or refinements about their own best practices, about how they stay clear and get more space to even do more cooler stuff. That's kind of a long, non-answer to your question!

RT: I think you've absolutely answered it there. And just as a side note, David, you and your team write an excellent email newsletter every month, I'm going to encourage listeners of this podcast to subscribe to www.gettingthingsdone.com.

You feature stories every month of people who have implemented GTD, and I love reading about the changes that GTD has helped people achieve. We'll include the link to that newsletter sign up in the show notes. You should go out and then asked Robert Downey Jr. If he can become one of the featured newsletter people!

DA: A lot of those guys get bombarded by everybody that wants their endorsements, so no need to bother about that. It'd be great if he did though, but I'd be a little bit shy to yank people's chain when it happens all the time.

RT: I want to rewind to something you mentioned earlier on – you mentioned martial arts and meditation. From my own experience, without getting too woo-woo in thinking about this, GTD enabled me to get organised enough to see clearly where I was wasting my time and to gradually become more aware of knowing what I don't know, if that makes sense.

What are some of the knock-on personal development effects that you've seen GTD have on others? Perhaps is a question for you - how did GTD open your mind to some of the other things that you talked about? Or did those things come before GTD?

DA: Those things came before GTD. I couldn't have really described how powerful GTD was in those terms when I first began to put all this together, but in retrospect I realised that was why I was so attracted to this.

I'm very much attracted to clear space and I'm very lazy. That's why that's why this took off in the IT world, because the IT people are almost as lazy as me. They're in a whole business that is about making life easier for people and GTD as an intact system with no leaks in it.

It's really lean for the brain. It's about no wasted thought. It does in your internal cognitive process, what lean and scrum and agile do in the outer process. Those are great things for the outer process but they don't deal with your inner process.

So what do you do with space? Invariably, anybody who gets stuff out of their head decides next actions and outcomes, parks those things at some trusted place is going to is going to create much more cognitive space. How they use that as up to them.

Howard Stern used it to be able to keep doing with his radio businesses as well as then learn to paint, which he'd always wanted to do. And Jim Kim, head of the World Bank, who I've coached, said that his presenting issue was, "When I go home with my young kids on the weekend, I did not want to take the World Bank with me."

He's a practising Buddhist, so it gave him time and room to actually sit and meditate in his executive office. People use it in all different ways for a lot of different kinds of things.

Anybody listening to this, if they if they had nothing on their mind right now, a tabula rasa with nothing pulling or pushing on them and it was totally clear space, how would they use it?

Everybody's going to probably have a different answer. But whatever that answer is, it's probably about some more meaningful, interesting, fun, creative or juicy thing in their life, given what what's important to them.

RT: Let's delve a little bit deeper on that if we can. We've talked about GTD predominantly for daily productivity, but now we're exploring how it's effective to open up the mind for longer-term thinking and planning.

I know that with your martial arts back background, you're a black belt in karate, you've used the phrase 'mind like water' to describe this. Tell me a bit about bit more about that.

DA: I stole that from Bruce Lee's sensei, the guy who popularised that, or Bruce talked about that in terms of his own training - where water seems to be weak and had no power. Believe me, all you have to do is live in the Netherlands, and you'll reframe that!

The metaphor or analogy is that water is totally appropriately engaged with its environment. It doesn't overreact, it doesn't underreact. It can be rushing, it can be calm, but it's not confused.

The idea is that 'a mind like water' means that you're not over or under reacting to anything. You're not taking one meeting into the next, you're not taking home to work in your mind, or work at home in your mind.

Here's the big secret, as you probably know by now, getting things done is not so much about getting things done as it's really about being absolutely, appropriately engaged with all aspects of your life so you will be totally present with whatever you're doing: cooking spaghetti, watching your girl play soccer, having a difficult conversation, whatever.

Being present is the most optimal state to operate from, because you're not distracted, you have all access to your intuition and your cognitive resources, essentially. It's really about, are you appropriately engaged with your health? Are you appropriately engaged with your cat or with your eyes? Are you appropriately engaged with the project? Are you appropriately engaged with your business or with your podcasting?

RT: And one of the big trends at the moment that lots of people are interested in is mindfulness. Would you associate the two? Is what you've just described there akin to mindfulness?

DA: Duh! People talk about emotional intelligence and this is mental intelligence. Don't let your mind run you. A lot of mindfulness is about how to train your attention so that you can train yourself to keep your focus on something.

But if you need cat food, I'm too lazy to sit there trying to train myself not to think about I need cat food, why don't you just write it on a Post-It on the fridge, so you can sit down and have a quiet mind?!

The universe is always on. So meditation or mindfulness is not about slowing the world down, it's about stopping one aspect of the world so that you can pay attention to the more subtle ones.

Of course, now, the cognitive scientists have basically proven that your brain needs rest, that you need appropriate sleep, you need naps in the afternoon, you need to sleep on a project so that your unconscious can untie the knots and bypass your cognitive conditioning.

There are all kinds of things that they've now been able to prove, that you need rest, the brain needs to stop trying to think. It needs to finish its thinking so it can then daydream and be spontaneous and follow intuitive hunches.

That's how I like to live my life. People often think I'm so organised, but ask my wife! No, but I don't like to be distracted by anything, so I like the ability to be able to focus appropriately.

I'm only as organised as I need to be, so I have to think about what that is. It's in its place. That that usually means a clean desk and a zeroed out in basket. If I'm not doing something else, I want to clean those up and put that into Quicken and have all that done so that I get back to zero backlog again.

RT: Let's jump into that a little bit further. The audience for this podcast is typically tech-savvy folk, IT business owners, tech professionals. You've already mentioned, why GTD is such a hit in this tech community.

However, there is a tendency for us geeks, and I totally include myself in amongst this, to get distracted from actually being productive by what I would call productivity porn! It's the tools that you can use to implement GTD.

You famously described GTD as technology neutral. What does your own GTD tool set look like?

DA: Well, we still use IBM notes, the old Lotus Notes, and nobody's ever come up with anything that could compare to what you can do with Notes. I'm sorry it's sunset, because very few people really caught it.

I use the task function inside of notes to keep all of my lists, and a friend of mine, Eric Mack built a piece of software to overlay or underlay Lotus Notes, called 'E-Productivity', which slickens things a bit based upon the GTD methodology.

For instance, if I said you an email right now, and I'm waiting on you to get back to me, all I have to do is hit a little radio button when I send that and it automatically puts it on my waiting for list, date stamps it and puts your name on it.

That's a pretty slick way to reduce friction in terms of how I use technology to do that, but I used to elegant Danish paper planner time system, for 20 years, and there's probably no better tool than that to really be able to see quickly a larger context or map of all the different things that you're engaged in and how they relate to each other. A computer screen can't do that.

If you're highly disciplined with the GTD process you can make the digital world work really well. But I use all the standard stuff - I use Word, I use Excel, I use Snagit and I use Evernote for informal digital reference material, because they're so fast and easy and sync to my iPhone and my iPad as well as the Mac.

I just use some of those basic standard tools. I use Harlan Hugh's tool TheBrain, which is a fabulous mind-mapping, connecting tool. It's not a rigorous database, but it's an informal one that's very sexy, and very cool. I've used that for years.

I have my low-tech stuff, I have my note taker wallet that goes with me wherever I carry credit cards. It has a little pad and a cool little pen. I'm staring right now at a small, A5-size notepad on my desk with a pen right on it, because God knows when something's going to strike and I need to write something down.

I have a physical in basket. And I've got a simple little reference system. I have an alpha filing system, which used to be four drawers and now is just one, given how much we can digitise and PDF stuff these days. That's pretty much it.

RT: It doesn't have to be complex, does it? On the topic of pen and paper, I also prefer writing notes, which surprises some of my peers in the IT industry, fellow geeks who are all about technology. I'm all about technology, but I prefer writing notes and then scanning them in electronically for storage and retrieval.

I do something that sounds not dissimilar to you - I write stuff down and then convert it into PDFs. What does your note taking routine look like? Do you literally write things down with pen and paper, tear it off, put it in the in-tray and it gets scanned?

DA: Yeah, that's what I do. Because for the most part, I don't even bother snapping a picture or scanning any of the hand-written notes. Every once in a while, I might do that, but for the most part, I need to think through what's on there.

I need the freedom to write all kinds of crappy ideas and all kinds of stuff. And then later on, when I'm in my executive thinking function mode, then I can sit down and say, "OK, what does that mean, what's the action step, what I'm going to do about that, where does that go?"

And then I'll digitalise that stuff, because that's just easier for me to capture all of that. But there's a second thinking process. That's the problem - a lot of people confuse 'capture' with 'organised' and they're very different functions. If you do that, you won't capture a lot of things, because you think it has to be organised to capture it.

Or you're capturing a whole lot of stuff you'd actually don't need to organise, because you're just gathering all kinds of crap that's going to lie fallow somewhere. You need step two of the 'getting things done five step process'.

First is capture: I need to identify what's got my attention, or what might have my attention, and that's note-taking, whether you're in a meeting or whether you wake up with an idea.

Step two is: You need to then be able to throw away that note, because you've made a decision about is this actionable? Is it yes or no? If it's no, you toss it, you file it, or you triggered for later review.

Is it actionable? What's the next action or what's the project? That's a very simple but very powerful algorithm about how you actually clarify the things that have your attention, that you've captured.

If you don't go to step two, then you just wind up being a compulsive list-maker and then you're throwing stuff all over the world. It's going to crawl back up in your psyche and take up room again if you're not getting the backlog emptied.

All kinds of people are complaining about inbox zero now: "Come on. That's too much work!" Well, great! Just let your mailbox fill up! Just let your garbage bin fill up! Hey, why not? Yeah, what the heck, it's too much trouble!" Grow up.

I understand the issue, because the volume is huge out there in terms of the digital stuff coming at us. But you have to then go to that second process of deciding what these things mean and what you need to do about them.

Do you need to keep it for reference or review again in two weeks? Thinking about all that stuff is the second stage and you've got to train yourself to do that, do it on the front end, and then organise the results in the appropriate places so your brain doesn't have to have the job of remembering and reminding you.

RT: You touched on something there, inbox zero - clearing everything out there. When I'm sharing GTD with people within the tech industry, they are absolutely flabbergasted that it can get an inbox to zero a sec.

It's not a case of doing everything while you're there, it's about saying, "OK, that's going to be moved away, that's going to be put on the task list, it's just not going to be sat there, blinking away and reminding me constantly."

You touched on one of my favourite GTD tools - the note-taker wallet. I've just got to tell you actually, it's incredibly hard to get hold of here in the UK. One of my dear US-based friends, Matt Cleary, who sadly passed away earlier this year, gifted me one from Texas.

It's something I find really useful and it reminds me and that every time I take it out, which is a lovely thing as well. You could replicate that easily just by carrying a pen and paper. All of my coats have got pens and paper in, so I've effectively got a note-taker wallet wherever I go.

DA: It's great. No Wi Fi required, no batteries required.

RT: Yes, it never runs out. Let's move on to something else that GTD introduced me to, and that's the concept of a 'someday, maybe list.' Those tasks that perhaps you want to achieve, but not right now. Can you share a bit more about the thinking behind the someday maybe list?

DA: In a sense, everything is someday, maybe, except talking to me right now. The world could end in five minutes and we didn't get any the rest of it. It's about what kind of shelf do you want to put it on?

I think it's an important distinction to make between projects, activities or things you would potentially like to do but you either don't have the bandwidth to do them or it's not timing to do them yet, but you don't want to lose the idea.

It's a very creative process, and probably one of the best ways to describe it is: I had a very sophisticated guy go through one of my seminars. We coached him and he's been around my stuff for quite a while.

One of his big 'a-has' was the someday maybe list, because this guy is a very senior consultant with major global companies, executive level, C suite consultant. He was always coming up with cool things that he could do for different clients, but then at a certain point he got burned out, because he thought he had to do something about all of those ideas.

He was overwhelmed and blew his fuses. So, when he realised, "Wait a minute, I can have a someday maybe list. Here's things I *might* want to do with that client or with any client." It totally opened up his creative process again, so that he didn't feel like he was blowing fuses or being constipated, in terms of his thinking anymore.

He gave himself permission to have the idea but not have to move on it. So, a very simple practical distinction I make is somebody maybes do not have next actions on them. They're just reviewed on some consistent recursion to see if I'm ready to activate them now or not. And my someday maybe list is longer than my project list

It includes taking a balloon ride, it includes writing my memoirs and a lot of things that it might be cool at some point to do, so I don't lose the idea. Oftentimes, the someday maybe things actually just happen, because all you have to do is start focusing on anything and they slip in. It's a very creative list to have.

RT: They do just happen. I've got a someday, maybe list that's in Evernote, stuff that just gets put off that I review maybe once a week, just have a quick scan through, but I've also got a bucket list.

That's a phrase people will be familiar with - things that you want to do before you kick the bucket. I review that typically once every three to six months, and I go out there and do it.

I have things on that list, such as go in a hot air balloon, catch a helicopter ride over New York, lots of other things like that. It surprised me that when I was reviewing this after three to six months, I was knocking these things off. I'm actually going and doing it.

And yet, I haven't set out to say, "Right in the next quarter, we're going to book a hot air balloon ride", it just happened. There is something about logging those ideas, getting them out of your head, but then they get lodged subconsciously and you look for opportunities to do it without thinking about it

DA: True. It happens. And by the way, just for your information, because I can do it very easily with the software I have, I actually sub-categorised my someday maybes. I have 'creative someday maybes', I have my 'company and professional someday maybes'.

I have 'explore someday maybes', like take a canal boat vacation in the Bordeaux region or take a houseboat cruise on the Thames. And then 'personal someday maybes', 'someday

maybe reads' and then 'unhooked', - if I truly have nothing else to do in my life. Latin dance classes, or a balloon ride.

It's kind of fun just to play with that and to see what would show up when I actually sorted my 'someday maybes' into different categories, but you've done that quite simply with the bucket list.

RT: Let's talk about something we've touched upon already. I've been using GTD since 2002, and in all that time, the one thing I still struggle with to this day is...

DA: Is the weekly review.

RT: Is the weekly review! How did you know I was going to say that?!

DA: You're the only person on the planet who has that problem and I followed you around.

RT: Maybe because every GTD-er has struggled with the weekly review! When I don't do it. I suffer, when I do a weekly review consistently, I thrive. Why am I not doing the weekly review consistently when it is so powerful and helps me to thrive?

Why do what the people struggle with this and have you spotted any links?

DA: Yes, they're human. I haven't met anybody who loves doing it regularly. I think I have met one or two people who say they absolutely, rigorously never fail to do it. I still have to get myself to do it.

I think it has a lot to do with the fact that it's going to force you to think from a higher horizon about your life and what you're doing and grapple with all of that. To say, "Where am I right now, in space and time? How am I doing as a human being right now?"

I think in a way it holds up the hand mirror to you. "Hey, Richard, what's up? How's your life? What are you doing?" I think that's probably part of it, and I think part of it is, that old saw - when you most need to plan is when you least feel like doing it. When you most, really need to get organised is when you feel like you don't have the time to do that. I think we resist our own success for multiple reasons. Hmm,

RT: I've got a lot better doing the weekly review, I should say, for all the reasons talked about. Perhaps if we speak in another 15 years, I might have got it to doing it three times a month.

DA: Yeah, we call it the monthly weekly review!

RT: Another challenge that I've seen people wrestle with is when they pick and choose elements of GTD to implement. I empty my mind of everything, from hiring a new employee to buying cat food. How do you help people understand the power of emptying your mind of everything, not just the things they consider important?

DA: I've tried for 35 years to convince people why this is necessary to do. Actually, you just have to start doing it, and then see how it feels. Cognitively, it doesn't make any sense and it's a little counterintuitive.

“Why should I give as much effort to buy cat food as I do to buy the company. Well, the funny thing is, if all that's still in your head, cat food will take up as much space as buy the company, and either one will wake you up at three o'clock in the morning.

If you don't give appropriate attention to anything that has your attention, it'll take more of your attention that it deserves. That's why you deal with the small stuff - because it's small stuff. Don't take up any more cognitive room than you need to.

If you're not going to buy cat food, give your cat away. Duh! It's just dealing with your life, and once you understand, at least, if you catch the idea that your head is for having ideas, but not holding them, that means nothing in there.

What you want to do is create clear space so you can really focus on the meaningful stuff, or the fun stuff, the interesting stuff, the intuitive stuff or the intelligent stuff, which is what your mind is for.

It did not evolve to remember/remind. Your brain did not evolve to remember, remind and manage priorities or the relationships between more than four things. If you just understand that, then why on earth would you keep 'I need cat food' in your head? That's really stupid.

RT: And the cat goes hungry.

DA: Well, if it jumps on your face, you'll then probably go do something.

RT: What does a typical day look like for David Allen nowadays?

DA: There is no typical day for David Allen! Not really. It is slowing down a little bit; I'll be 73 next month, so I guess it should. We've shrunk our business from delivering and marketing in the US, and we've now got a great partner to handling that.

We're now really in the IP licensing business, so we're down to eight of us. There's much less complexity in terms of my world. My day starts the night before, when I'm looking at what is the hard landscape for the next day or two, so I can see how long I can sleep. I love sleep!

I'm looking at, 'where do I need to be, what do I need to do', to let my brain see that and be able to sleep on the things that I've had commitment to handle, the hard landscape as we call it, in the next day or day or two.

I wake up in the morning, and of course I have to take the dog out. I have a glass of lemon water to cleanse my system, and then make a pot of fresh-brewed, French-pressed iced coffee. I read the New York Times, play a game or two, maybe check Instagram and social media things as I'm waking up, and then I do whatever feel like doing.

What helps to be able to have that freedom to do that, is that I do fairly regularly weekly reviews, which hardwires your intuitive intelligence to notice deadlines that are coming up, things that have to happen and a larger sense of the game I'm in and the important things that I need to put my attention on.

Essentially, you don't have time to think, you need to have already thought. Building in and having an external system, having a GTD system and having a practice of reviewing this stuff and keeping this going...

It's funny, but you have to use your mind to quiet your mind. A lot of people want to quiet their mind by not thinking of deciding about stuff. Sorry, the way out is through. I just figured out the algorithm about 'how do I use my mind most efficiently and most effectively, so that it frees it up?' That makes it a whole lot easier to then navigate spontaneously, which is what I like to do.

RT: I want to pick up on something that you said there about you prepping for the day ahead the night before. As we do this call, I can see you're in your home office with books around you.

I'm in my home office, and one area where I've struggled with is a daily shut-down routine - coming to the end of the day and saying, 'OK. what's going to go on ahead?' Almost to the point of I want to make sure that I can relax and enjoy my evening with my family. Any tips on doing that?

DA: Start your review before you do that. Say, 'Hey, I'm going to close up, I'm just going to go unhook and not focus on any of this stuff. I'm just going to take a quick scan through everything.'

RT: As simple as that, and then close down for the day.

DA: I have a famous saying, "that you can only feel good about what you're not doing when you know what you're not doing." You need to take a look at the inventory of all the things you're not going to do that night, and go, 'That's fine. Family is better, a beer is better, a glass of wine is better. A nap is better or walk the dog is better.'

RT: Something else that you and I share in common and probably you more so than me is travel. We travel a lot. I know you're in this wonderful location and Amsterdam you shared with me you can get from home to Schiphol Airport in minutes what was your record by the way, from Schiphol to the front room?

DA: It takes me 25 minutes to walk out my door and check in at KLM. That's pretty standard, because things work here in the Netherlands.

RT: You've just made a lot of people jealous, who wrestle getting through security! To travel, I find it knocks my productivity a lot. How do you remain productive when you travel?

DA: I get very productive when I travel and it's sort of stimulating environments but nobody's yanking your chain. You can work. If I'm on a long plane ride, it's a great time to catch up

and do creative writing particularly. Sometimes that's a good time to do the sort of lighter stuff that I usually don't give myself permission to do, like reading magazines.

I don't do a lot of reading, but if there is some sort of neat book that I want to get through, that's a great time to do all that. If your life is structured, like mine is, you just take advantage of wherever you are.

If I'm waiting in the dentist's office and I don't want you know my smartphone and get hooked down into any of that stuff, I'll just sit and meditate. Just do nothing. Which, by the way, is back to the mindfulness. It's actually a challenge. How well you do nothing is pretty good hallmark of how well you do GTD.

RT: Let's talk about the original GTD book - that was published in 2001. I remember picking up in early 2002. You revised that book in 2015, I think, and you've also released follow up books, like 'Ready for Anything' and 'Making it all Work.'

Your latest GTD book, that I know you've had a hand in producing, surprised me We bought a copy, my wife and I, and have been reading it - 'GTD for Teens'. Where did that book come from?

DA: Over all these years, I've had thousands of people say, "Oh my God, I wish I had learned this when I was 12." I didn't know how to write this, or rewrite it for 12-year-olds. I don't have kids myself.

But people have said, "Oh my God, how do I get this to my kids? They need to learn this now." I ran across a woman not long ago; her son is 11 and he had 500 WhatsApp messages.

The kids have got it in their face these days, in terms of how many things are potentially distracting them from stuff they might, would, could, should ought to be focused on.

And then I ran across two guys, both of them have kids. One guy's a teacher and has been teaching his eight to 10-year-olds in public schools the GTD process, once he'd got it. And very successfully, by the way. They are the ones who really did the heavy lifting of, 'how do we take this methodology and frame it in a more accessible way for somebody?'

The Getting Things Done book itself can be pretty heavyweight if somebody picks it up, I just threw it all in there, I just wrote the manual. It's like picking up a manual for Word, which is a little daunting if you're just trying to learn the word processor.

It'd be nice to lower the barrier of entry in order to be able to engage with something like that, so that's what we wanted to do. The jury's still out and I don't know how many kids are going to actually pick up a book by themselves to do it.

In a way the trigger was writing this for caring adults: parents, counsellors, teachers, people who are dealing with kids and want to have a tool to be able to make it more accessible in terms of the stories.

RT: My wife Claire works in schools and we've picked up 'GTD for Teens' and it's already made an impact there. I think that as the years go on, you're going to see more results come from it.

From teens to teens at heart. You talked about the fact it's going to be your birthday, you're going to be turning 73 on the day this podcast is released, so please consider this my incredibly cheap gift to you!

Joking aside, you've built this incredible legacy and had such an impact on people worldwide. What motivates you now? What do you enjoy doing with your time on a day to day basis?

DA: The biggest miracle of my life is that I've been able to make a fairly successful career of talking about 12 things. How bizarre is it that I can have I still am involved and motivated to talk about those 12 things in different ways?

I can't help talking about it. If I was never going to see anybody again the rest of my life and I wanted to share something with them that would improve their life, this is what I would do.

I feel totally blessed. God's given me a great gift that I somehow was able to come up with something that doesn't hurt – it's not running with scissors. Anybody who does any of this is going to improve their life, be able to see themselves better, do better and feel better and get rid of the pressure. How cool could it be?

RT: Exactly. When we sat down for dinner in Amsterdam, you tell me about some of the other jobs you've had. How many were there?

DA: 35 by the time I was 35.

RT: Impressive. What job would you be doing if you weren't able to make people's lives better with GTD?

DA: I'd be a waiter and a really good restaurant

RT: That's very cool. I'm looking at the clock and I can see we're coming to the end of our time together. Thank you so much for your time that you spent with me today. I know how busy you are, so I really, really do appreciate.

DA: It's been fun. Richard, come on!

RT: I've had such a kick talking to you about it. I mean, you are the man who created GTD. I just love speaking to people about GTD, which is sort of a weird thing to say! Any plans for a conference or a get-together of GTD enthusiasts.

DA: Here's a little hint. We're planning on a one time only GTD global summit in Amsterdam next summer.

RT: Wow. Tell me more! I'm literally bouncing up and down in my seat excited here. Tell me more about this GTD summit.

DA: I can't tell you too much, because we're waiting to launch the GTD summit site, which will probably be up in the next couple of weeks. By the time somebody hears this, they can find it at www.gtdsummit.com and see all the information about it. And it's going to be very, very cool.

RT: I would definitely be there. That sounds like my idea of heaven. Have we got any dates for GTD summit?

DA: June 20th and 21st.

RT: It's going in my diary. Before you go, if any of our listeners want to reach out to you, how can they best find you other than buying a copy of GTD?

DA: You always go to our website: www.gettingthingsdone.com and that's how you can get the newsletter. You can actually reach me through the website if you want or you can email me directly: david@davidco.com. I'm GTD guy on Twitter and @dallen45 on Instagram. I'm all around!

RT: While I'm sure you'd make an incredible waiter. I'm glad you're not, and I'm really glad that you're still teaching people about GTD instead. Let me take this opportunity to personally thank you for the impact you've had on my life. I really appreciate it. I know I won't be alone in thank you for sharing GTD with the world so genuinely heartfelt thanks.