

# A Humble Tool Often Supports Magnificent Results

Both Deena's head and heart are pounding. She believes she's stressed because of her desire to accomplish something she can't seem to do. Her goal is clear; she wants to downsize. She's seeking more simplicity and less yard work. She's been considering this move for two years. Every time she sees a great condo for sale she gets excited, but becomes depressed within minutes as she looks around her huge, overstuffed house and considers the magnitude of actually moving. Then she berates herself on her ineptitude.

Deena works with a productivity coach and within twenty minutes she is smiling. She has a solution in hand, but refuses to tell anyone because it's so ludicrously simple. It's a silly little list and it's wonderful.

In the coaching world structures are thought of as tools for keeping people on track and in action.

This particular structure, a list, holds all of the ideas that are floating around in Deena's head that make her crazy. It's been categorized and prioritized. Blocks of time and dates have been assigned to tasks. How mundane, how unsexy, and how workable it all now seems. Deena's chaotic internal talk has been externalized into an organized form, her tension is transformed into energy.

David Allen, productivity author and consultant is accustomed to readers and clients who dismiss the importance of a tool they can easily put to work to reduce their stress and improve their effectiveness. He continues to be committed to lists especially organized lists which clearly outline next steps. Coaches urge clients to find structures and tools to help them accomplish their goals.

When Deena returns home she uses several structures. First she puts a motivation tool to work, it's a picture of the perfect condo on her screen saver, then she tackles and completes her first task on the list. Afterwards she writes down her next step. Finally she uses an acknowledgment tool, a congratulatory email to herself. By the next year, Deena is sipping wine in her new condo. Everything just seemed so much more doable once she used tools to support her goal. Reminding herself of her goal with the screensaver and sending herself a celebratory email gave Deena additional oomph to continue. Once she built a little momentum, she was unstoppable. Writing down her next step kept her focused on consistently taking action.

Coaches and therapists say that the majority of their clients are feeling that they are "in overwhelm." Capable people often feel discouraged by a lack of progress that they wrongly attribute to their deficient personality or character when what they actually need is to find the right structures to support their actions. They try to carry all of their thoughts in their head and instead carry confusion and tension. Getting whirling ideas on paper so that they can be clarified and managed into a useful list often can feel like the lifting of a huge weight. Fragmented attention and energy become focused.

Coaches tell many success stories of clients who transformed their frustrations into magnificent outcomes by finally using some very simple structures. Supposedly a productivity expert received \$25,000 a number of years ago for teaching a steel mill CEO the power of using a simple list some call the list of six. He wrote down the six most important things to do the next day, prioritized them, and proceeded to do them one by one. After interruptions, he went back to the list and continued where he left off. Each day he continued the same process. He didn't worry about those things he didn't get to, if they were pertinent the next day, they stayed on the list. The consultant claimed he increased his client's productivity by fifty percent and made the CEO millions of dollars.

Especially when the task seems important, complex , unpleasant, or new; we can increase our chances of implementation while keeping our stress low by finding and using a lowly structure like a list. How might you move up to the good life by using the right tool to support your goals?